

SERMONS

Preach'd on

Several Occasions.

VOLUME I.

The Second Edition Corrected.

By JOHN CONANT, D.D.

Published by Dr. JOHN WILLIAMS,
now Lord Bishop of *Chichester*.

L O N D O N :

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TO THE
INHABITANTS
OF
NORTHAMPTON

AND
More especially to those of the
Parish of St. Andrew

Christian Friends and Neighbours

Having my great

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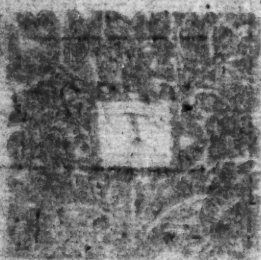
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TO THE
INHABITANTS
OF
NORTHAMPTON,
AND



More especially to those of the
Parish of *All-Saints* there;

Christian Friends and Neighbours,

 Hough my great
Age, and the In-
firmities attending
it, have lately
constrained me to quit my re-
lation to you, yet I still account
my self obliged to endeavour
to promote your spiritual wel-
fare what I may. In order
A 2 where-

The Epistle Dedicatory.

whereunto, I here lay before
you some few of those plain and
practical Sermons which I for-
merly preached unto you; ho-
ping that they may take better
effect, than when you heard
them from the Pulpit; which
that they may so do, is the
unfeigned Desire and earnest
Prayer of

Your truly loving Friend
and Servant,

JOHN CONANT.

THE
PUBLISHER
TO THE
READER.

IT may be expected by those that knew the Reverend Author of these Sermons, and the publick Station he was in for several years in the Univerſity of *Oxford*, as Divinity Profeſſor there, that he ſhould have gratified the World with another ſort of Work, I mean his Lectures which he there read, and were compoſed with great Learning, Accuracy and Judgment. But that it ſeems is not ſo agreeable to his native modeſty, who chuſes rather to live and die in a kind of obſcurity, than be ſet *as a city upon an hill*; and values himſelf more upon the relation he had to a Parochial Cure, and the Capacity he was in of doing good to the Souls of men, than of being in one of the moſt publick Stations in the Church: And in which, ſince by the privation of his Sight, and
other

The Publisher to the Reader.

other Infirmities of Age, he has been no longer able to serve, he thought, by publishing some Practical Discourses preach'd in that Auditory, he might, though he be in a sense dead, yet speak, and be useful among them.

The Discourses are such as he usually composed, plain and practical, and suited to the meanest Capacity.

And if there be any thing that is not of that nature (as there is very little) and which the Author, had he had the last perusal, would have revised; the Error is to be imputed to the Publisher, to whose care and choice they were committed.

The Two last Sermons are Occasional, but the occasion such as will render them profitable to all.

John Williams.

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The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of Hosts.

The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of Hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of Hosts. p. 469.

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JOHN III. 19, 20.

And this is the condemnation, That light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

For every one that doth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.



May take it for granted, That by light here, we are to understand the light of the Gospel; And yet hereby Christ is not excluded, who is called *the light*, in the seventh and eighth Verses of the First Chapter of this Evangelist, and *the true light*, v. 9. Both these lights may well go together; Christ the Son of Righteousness, and the Gospel the Rays which he sends forth to enlighten the dark World.

Besides, as Christ conveyeth to us the Gospel, so the Gospel conveyeth Christ un-

B

to

The First Sermon.

Gal. 1. 7. to us, and offers him unto the World; in both which respects it's called *the Gospel of Christ*, Gal. 1. 7. he being, as the Author, so the principal subject of it. Now both these Lights are come into the World; Christ by his Incarnation, and together with him the Gospel, *i. e.* a more full and clear discovery of the way of Salvation by Christ, than before.

That *the Light* in both senses is come into the World, and finds no better reception; This is *The condemnation*, *κρίσις*, the judgment, according to the proper acception of the word; but here *κρίσις* for *κρίσις*, Judgment, for Condemnation, by an usual Synecdoche, and so our Translators have rendered it, looking rather at the sense, than at the immediate propriety of the word. Again, This is *The condemnation*, that is, by a Metonymy, the cause of condemnation, that which deserves, meritoriously procures and brings on condemnation. Lastly, This is *The condemnation*, not solely and exclusively as to all other things, but in the sense that shall be afterwards mentioned when I come to speak to that particular.

The words of my Text, (not to spend time in any unnecessary Preface to what I have to say) we may conveniently resolve into these four Propositions.

1. That light is come into the world.
2. That men love darkness rather than light.
3. That

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3. That the reason why men love darkness rather than light, is, *because their deeds are evil.*

4. That *this is the condemnation, that though light be come into the world, yet men love darkness rather than light.*

Passing by the three former, the last of these Propositions is that which I intend at present to insist on, as being the chief thing intended in this portion of holy Scripture. Concerning the sense of which Proposition, a few words will be necessary to be premised, before I proceed to lay down the grounds thereof. This is *The Condemnation*, not solely and exclusively as to all other things, as if nothing else could condemn a man, but signally and emphatically *in rebus*, the great meritorious cause of the severest punishment. I say, the rejection of the light of the Gospel, or not giving it due entertainment, is not the only thing that condemns men. For,

1. Those Heathens unto whom the light of the Scriptures never came, shall not therefore be exempted from punishment: The Apostle hath taught us, *That as many as have sinned without the law, shall also perish without the law.* Their Sins against their natural light, and the Law of Nature written in their hearts, shall condemn them; there shall be no need of calling in the assistance of the Law externally promulged, and written in Tables of Stone; much less of the Gospel, to give evidence against them.

Rom. 2. 12

The First Sermon.

22d.
Quest. 10.
Artic. 1.

'Tis true, if the Gospel were never offered them, and they shut up under a moral impossibility of being acquainted with it, we cannot apprehend how their not believing should be charged upon them as their sin. *Aquinas* hath rightly stated this matter; *Si infidelitas sumatur secundum negatione puram, sicut in illis qui nihil audiverunt de fide, non habet rationem peccati*: pure negative infidelity, or a meer not believing in those who never heard any thing of the Gospel, hath not the nature of Sin. And this was likewise *St. Austin's* judgment, as appears by the Exposition he gives of the words of our Saviour, *John 15. 22. If I had not come unto them, they had had no sin*: *Loquitur de peccato quo non crediderunt in Christum*, Our Saviour speaketh, saith he, of the sin of not believing in Christ. Though they had been guilty of many other Sins, yet their not believing had not been imputed to them. And the reason hereof is evident, because they had never a power in *Adam* of believing that which was never made known unto them; there being a simple impossibility and repugnancy in the nature of the thing, that a man should by Faith assent to, and embrace that, which he was never in the least acquainted with, which was never as much as propounded to him to be the object of his Faith. *How shall we believe on him of whom we have not heard?* *Rom. 10. 14.* 'Tis a question that cannot be answered. *Adam* himself, with all that strength which he received from God, could not have done it; and

and therefore neither can that be required of his Posterity, which he himself never received.

2. As for such as have the Gospel published to them, and finally persevere in unbelief, neither is their unbelief the only Sin for which they are condemn'd. What sober man can think that one Sin can expunge another? that mens unbelief should take off and extinguish the guilt of all their other sins, so as none of them should at all come under consideration, when Christ pronounceth the condemnatory Sentence? They who should entertain so wild a fancy, must have forgotten the form of the Proceedings at the last day, as Christ himself hath described it, *Matth. 25.* where express mention is made of other Sins, as the ground of the Sentence to be then pronounced.

Yet I deny not but that in a limited sense, wicked men living under the light of the Gospel, may be said to be condemned only for their unbelief; because if they had believed, none of their other Sins should have condemned them. But now, they not believing, the guilt of all their other Sins against the Law abideth on them; and besides, there is an addition of further guilt by their great Sin against the Gospel; and this their Sin against the Gospel, is that which presseth them most heavily, and hath the strongest influence upon the final Sentence for the inflaming and heightening of it.

So then, these things being thus premised, we have the sense of the Proposition before us. This is *The condemnation*, the matter and meritorious cause of the most sore and dreadful condemnation, *when light being come into the world*, the Gospel being published, and Christ in the Gospel being tendered to the Sons of men, they slight and refuse this light, preferring darkness before it, and chusing rather to continue in their Sins, though it cost them dear, than to embrace Christ to their everlasting bliss and happiness.

Now the grounds of the Proposition, together with the equity of that Severity which it imports, will further appear unto us, if we take into consideration these ensuing particulars.

1. 'Tis light that is refused, and refused with an affront put upon it, darkness being preferred before it. Now in this alone there are several things which do not a little aggravate a mans Sin, and by consequence heighten his punishment.

1. When a man goes on against light, there is more of the formality of Sin, than where light is wanting: There is a direct and plain opposition against the Rule, an intentional *aversion*, or irregularity: whereas, in case of Ignorance, the Rule indeed was violated materially, but not formally and wittingly as such. Our Saviour lays much stress upon this for the greatning of a man's Sin. *If ye*

Joh. 9. 41.

were

were blind, ye should have no sin; that is, none in comparison of what now you have. And to the same effect is that of St. James, Ch. 4. 17 *To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin; that is, Sin to the purpose, Sin of no ordinary complexion.*

2. What is done against light, hath not only an inconformity to the Rule, but some degree of contempt thereof. Wherefore in such cases God looks upon himself as despised. *Why hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord?* said he to David, when he had knowingly and deliberately sinned, 2 Sam. 12. 9.

3. It argues Corruption to have gotten head, and to have grown up to a great measure of strength and maturity; it argues such a person to be set upon Sin, and wholly bent to gratify himself therein; whatsoever shall come of it. When the light it self shall stand in a man's way, and flash in his face, and yet he will go on, he acts as one so resolved to Sin, as nothing shall take him off. This, in the Language of the Scripture, is to Sin presumptuously, by which a man under the Law was judged to have *reproached the Lord*; in regard whereof, no less punishment was appointed than the utter cutting him off from among his people, Numb. 15. 30, 31.

And thus far I have only insisted on the consideration of light more generally: 'Tis light that is refused and contemned; and therefore neither the Sin, nor the Punish-

ment of the person so offending, can be small.

2. 'Tis not any kind of light, but Gospel-light, that is so ill treated; and this hath yet much more in it, than all that hath been hitherto mentioned.

1. The light of the Gospel is a clearer light. All other light is but darkness to this. The Heathens had the light of Nature for their guide; but yet they were still in darkness till the Gospel enlightened them; for the very Errand of the Gospel to them was, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light. The Jews under the dispensation of the Law, had much more light; and yet were heavenly things in great part so veiled and wrapt up in Types and Shadows, as their condition to that of Gospel-times seems to have been but as the morning spread upon the Mountains, to the noon-day-light.

2. 'Tis a light that presents to our view the most excellent and most desirable things: Pardon of sin, Act. 10. 43. Peace with God, Rom. 5. 1. Eternal Life, Joh. 3. 36. A kingdom that cannot be shaken, Heb. 12. 28. An inheritance incorruptible, and fadeth not away, 1 Pet. 1. 4. Such things as neither eye hath seen, nor ear hath heard, nor have entered into the heart of man to conceive, 1 Cor. 13. 9.

3. These

Acts 16.
18.

3. These excellent things which the light of the Gospel sets before us, are such as were by infinite Wisdom and unspeakable Love designed and contrived for us before the foundations of the World were laid. The most wise and gracious God did in nothing more discover the unsearchable Treasures of his Wisdom, and the Riches of his Grace, than in the Contrivance of our Salvation in such a way, as in which Mercy and Justice so admirably meet together, and Righteousness and Peace kiss each other. We cannot therefore refuse or slight these excellent things, without a manifest disparagement of the Wisdom and Love of God; as if neither the one, nor the other, were considerable herein; and as if after all that God hath done, the things so wisely designed, and graciously proffer'd, were not worth our acceptance.

4. The Gospel preleth the entertainment of these excellent things with the most cogent and forcible Arguments. 'Tis not laid before us as a matter of indifferency, whether we will embrace what's tendered, or refuse it. We are told and assured, that as the acceptance of the things proffered will render us unspeakably blessed and happy to eternity, so the refusal of them will certainly make us everlastingly and unconceivably miserable. *He that believeth, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned, Mark 16. 16.*

5. Besides the external tender of these things in the Gospel, the Spirit of God usually more or less accompanies the outward Mini-

Ministration of the Gospel, inwardly working together with it, treating with us, and soliciting the matters of our peace by Enlightenings and Convictions, by stirring up good Motions and Affections, Purposes and Resolutions, which makes our refusal of mercy after all this, much more worthy of the severest punishment.

6. Add to all this, the consideration of the greatness of the Person who at first published the Gospel, and made tender of those excellent things to the World himself, while here on Earth; and also still continues to do it by his Servants. The Lord of Life and Glory, the Eternal Son of God, who is over all, God blessed for ever, came in Person from Heaven out of the Bosom of his Father, *on this very Errand, that he might make reconciliation for sin, and bring in everlasting righteousness, and offer the fruits and benefit of all to Mankind, making this general Proclamation, Whosoever believeth shall be saved.*

If but an Earthly Prince should send his only Son to the remotest Parts of his Dominions, on purpose to make tender of some great thing to one of his meanest Subjects, what an indignity, and how intolerable an affront would it be, if that his tender should be slighted! But here the King Eternal sends his only Son from Heaven to offer us Everlasting Life, and we entertain him no otherwise, than as if he came on a needless Embassy; for so much our most unworthy carriage towards him imports, if we do not accept

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cept of his Tenders. This the Scripture insists on as a circumstance that carries in it no small aggravation of the sin of our unbelief.

If the word spoken by Angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, which at first began to be spoken to us by the Lord? And again, If they escaped not who refused him who spake from earth; much more shall not we escape, if we refuse him who speaketh from heaven. Heb. 2. 2, 3. Heb. 12. 25.

Now put all these things together, and I see not how you can chuse but conclude, That as there is no sin like that which is committed against the light of the Gospel, so there is no punishment like unto that which will be inflicted for this sin: or, That *this is the condemnation, That light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light.* And so I proceed to the application of what hath been spoken.

U S E I.

First then, To speak to the more dissolute Professors of the Christian Religion; From the Premises we may infer, That 'tis a most vain and empty Plea which many loose Christians think to help themselves with at the day of their account to God. They have had their birth and education where the light of the Gospel shines; and under the influences of that light they have lived. As soon as they came into the World, they were in Baptism dedi-

dedicated to Christ ; in that Ordinance they gave their Names to Christ, and listed themselves among his Followers and Soldiers ; and they never afterwards renounced him, but made profession of him all their days. What reason therefore have they to make any question but that Christ will own them ? They have not been Heathens or *Mahometans* ; Wherefore, though Christ should turn those wretched Infidels into Hell by thousands ; yet as for themselves, being Christians, they hope they may well expect more favour from him. Should he deal with them as with Heathens ? as with those who never wore his Livery ? who never made profession of him ? who never knew him, or heard of his Name ? This were hard measure, and such as they think they need not fear at the hands of so merciful a Saviour. Who should go to Heaven, if not such as themselves ? whom should Christ save, if not Christians ? Alas poor Souls ! You think to plead as those who make account that Christ is much beholding to you for vouchsafing to be called by his Name. But forasmuch as professing to know Christ, in your Works you deny him ; forasmuch as while you call him your Saviour, you refuse to be ruled by him as your Lord ; forasmuch as notwithstanding all the love you pretend to have for him, and his Gospel, your Actions are such as proclaim you to be those who love darkness rather than light, and who hate true Christianity, the reality and power of that which you make profession of ; had not Christ

Christ been more beholding to you, if you had never so much as in external profession owned him? If you had never been called by that blessed Name, which by your unholy lives you have reproached and profaned? Many Heathens were never in a capacity of dishonouring that Name, as having never had the knowledge of it; and your knowledge of Christ hath been of no other advantage to you, than only to enable you knowingly to slight him, and trample his precious Blood under your feet. Thus you throw dirt in your Saviour's face, while you would seem to honour him. *Quid est aliud sanctum vocabulum sine merito quam ornamentum in luto*, saith *Salvian*, in his 4th Book *de Gubernatione Dei*; The sacred Name of Christian without faith and holiness, what is it but an Ornament trodden under foot in the mire, or a precious Jewel which you have taken and drawn along the Kennel? But you debauched and vicious Persons, you wild Ranters, rather than sober Christians, speak out your inmost thoughts: Do you really make account of claiming special interest in Christ? and do you in earnest expect to be owned by him? With what face can you do it, while you continue to be as you are? *Cæsar* being at a Banquet, where he was but meanly entertained, and no way so as was suitable to the dignity of so great a Person; when the entertainment was over, instead of thanking him who had invited him, he only gave him this check in his ear, *Non putabam me tibi tam fami-*

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familiarum; I had not thought that we two had been so familiar. And will not Christ thank you much in the like manner, for having been called by his Name, and for reckoning your self among those that belong to him, and have a special interest in him? Do you not know how he will at the last day entertain you, and in what manner he will declare the sense he hath of your kindness? Thou lewd and profligate Person, who callest me Lord, who numbrest thy self among my Disciples, and the most intimate of my Retinue; how long have we been so well acquainted? Thou common Swearer, thou intemperate and unclean Person, thou scoffer at Religion, thou nominal Christian, but real Enemy to the Gospel, and all that sincerely profess it; how durst thou make mention of my Name, and take my Covenant in thy mouth, seeing thou hatest to be reformed, and castest my words behind thy back? Be it known unto thee, thou hast been much mistaken in me, I own no such Friends or Followers as thou art; Depart from me thou worker of iniquity, I know thee not. Oh most sad and terrible Disappointment! when you shall be thus condemned, and turned into Hell by him from whom all your Expectations of Salvation were! But yet this is not all; you shall not only be adjudged to Hell with the Heathen that know not God, and all the Families that call not on his Name; but you shall be more severely handled in that place of Torment, than the very Heathens. The

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Condition of a sober and temperate Heathen shall then be more tolerable, than that of a lewd and vicious Christian. And is it not a most righteous thing with God that it should be so? The Pagan World never had the light that you have been blest with: Pagans never had those many gracious Calls and Invitations to Faith and Repentance which you have had: Pagans never had the tenders of those Glorious Things which have in the Gospel been proffer'd you: The Terrors of the Law, and the torments prepared in Hell for all the people of the World that forget God, were never laid open, and set before their eyes, as they have been before yours; Pagans never had experience of those strong Convictions, of those inward Motions and Strivings of the Spirit of God with their Souls, which you have had: And yet after all this, you are in many respects much worse than many Heathens. And will you still think to plead, We are Christians, and should Christ deal with us as with Heathens? I tell you once more, no; he will not deal with you as with Heathens: As the Aggravations of your Sins have been incomparably greater, so shall your Punishment be; *It shall be more tolerable in the day of judgment for heathens, than for you.*

Mat. xi.
22, 23, 24.

U S E 2.

In the second place, I shall speak unto those who know much, and are still in the pursuit

pursuit of more knowledge, but make little conscience of practising what they know.

From what hath been delivered, we may also infer, how much it concerns these, to add conscientious practise to their knowledge, and to endeavour that all their Gifts may be seasoned with grace. The more knowledge any graceless Person hath, the greater without Repentance will his future Torments be, and the more intolerable his misery. You whose Spirits are with much fervour and intention carried out after knowledge, and yet possibly so much slight and undervalue Grace, as that you grudge to spend one hour in a serious enquiry into your spiritual Estate; I beseech you consider what you are a-doing: While you are adding Notion to Notion, and Conclusion to Conclusion, you are but heaping up matter for your more just and heavy Condemnation; you are but preparing Whips for your own backs. *For he that knows his masters will, and doth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes.* One stripe the more for every beam of light which was not improved to the ends for which it was afforded. I speak not this to disparage knowledge, which is an excellent gift of God, and a principal part of his Image in man; much less to dishearten any in their pursuit of it; but to provoke them to a joint endeavour after grace and knowledge, according to the Apostle's Exhortation, 2 Pet. 3. 18. It was said of Galba, who had a fine Wit, but a deformed Body, *Ingenium Galbae male habitat, Galba's*

Luk. 12.
47.

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Galba's good Wit bath but an ill habitation. The same may I say of excellent Gifts in a corrupt mind; 'Tis a thousand pities that so noble a Guest should have no better Lodgings. Get your Soul adorned with grace, and then it will be fitter to entertain Gifts. And to press this a little more upon you, let me leave with you only these three Considerations.

1. If Knowledge be excellent and desirable, Grace is much more excellent, and much more worthy to be the Object of our most raised desires. After the Apostle had been discoursing of those extraordinary and miraculous Gifts, which in the Primitive times God was pleased to pour out upon Believers, he makes way to his following Discourse of love and grace by this commendatory Preface; *Yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.* You are digging and searching after Knowledge, as after hid Treasure; and why not then much more after Grace, which is the most precious and invaluable Treasure, the only true Riches? *This ye ought to have done, and not to have left the other undone;* as our Saviour speaks in another case. Yea, this ye ought much rather to have done, in comparison whereof your pursuit of knowledge is but as *the tything of mint and cummin, compared with the most weighty matters of the law.*

1 Cor. 12.

31.

Luke 16.

11.

Matth. 23.

23.

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2. The

2. The more Knowledge you have, the more Grace you need. A little Grace will not suffice you to manage a large stock of Knowledge. Your Knowledge is one of your chiefest Talents for which you must be accountable; and 'tis impossible you should so imploy it, as to be able to give a comfortable account thereof without a proportionable measure of Grace. The higher any man is lifted up in parts and gifts, the more is he exposed to the violent assaults of manifold Temptations; Temptations to Pride, Self-confidence, overvaluing of himself, contempt of others, wicked abuse of his knowledge and parts to the service of Satan, and the Disservice of God, and his Church: And therefore no man hath more need of grace, of a plentiful measure of grace, than he that is most accomplisht with knowledge.

Ὅσοι πλείονα ἐκμάθησιν γινώσκουσιν, τόσῳ μάλ-
λον ἀποκείμεθα ἀνδρῶν, *The more knowledge we
have, the greater is our danger, saith Clem. Alex.
in the 4th Book of his Stromates.*

3. Unless you have grace together with your knowledge, the time will come, when you shall wish that you had been as ignorant, as you are graceless. *Quàm nescirem literas!* *How could I wish that I had never learnt to write or read,* was the mild and compassionate Speech of an Emperor, when he was desired to set his Hand for the Execution of a Malefactor. What he said out of a tender and merciful regard to the Life of another man, that shall the graceless and finally impenitent

penitent knowing man one day say, out of the anguish and horror of his own Soul; *Utinam nescissem literas !* Oh that I had never known my Letters, and that my Parents had never set me to School. Oh that I had been confined all my days to some poor Cottage, or dark Corner, where I might scarce have known my right Hand from my left : That I had been the most silly, ignorant, contemptible Creature in the World, a meer Idiot, or natural Fool, rather than by my Sins against so much knowledge, to have procured to my self this direful access to my Torments. You may have heard of a poor Idiot, who having never uttered one serious word before, was heard to utter this short and pertinent Petition when he was going out of the World. *Lord, require no more of me than thou hast given me.* The ungodly knowing man, the profane Wit, the learned Atheist, will have his mouth stopt ; he will not be able to find so good a Plea for himself, as that poor Idiot had. He hath received much from the hand of God, and much shall be required of him. And so I go on to what followeth in the 20th Verse.

The Second Sermon.

JOHN III. 20.

Every one that doth evil, hateth the light.

THE words are a Proposition so clearly and plainly express, that to endeavour to make it plainer were but to lose time. Seeing therefore I cannot express it in clearer terms, nor cast it into a better form, I shall even take it as it lies, and so handle it; *Every one that doth evil, hateth the light.* The Truth of which Proposition I know not how I can better demonstrate, than by shewing what influence the light hath upon men in reference to Sin; and, withal, how men stand affected towards their Sin.

1. The light (I mean principally the light of the Gospel, of which our Saviour here speaks) discovers Sin. There is a three-fold light which discovers Sin; the light of Nature, the light of the Law, and the light of the Gospel.

The Second Sermon.

(1.) The very light of Nature doth in some measure discover sin. The Gentiles who have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, their consciences in the mean while accusing or excusing them, according as their actions are more or less conformable to the dictates of the light of nature in them. This light was full and perfect, as it was at first set up in man by his Creator; but is by the fall now become weak and imperfect, so that in many things it leaves a man at a great loss. That first light represented things to man exactly according to their nature, so as by the help of it he could clearly and perfectly discern between good and evil; but now that Primitive light being in great part extinguished, the weak remainders of it represent good and evil in a dark and obscure manner, so as by this light alone a man sees many times little better than he who saw Men as Trees; yea worse a great deal, taking good for evil, and evil for good; light for darkness, and darkness for light, as the Prophet speaks.

Rom. 2.
14. 15.

Mar. 8. 24.

Isa. 5. 20.

Rom. 3. 20.

Rom. 7. 7.

(2.) The light of the Law of God written, goes further in the discovery of Sin, in which respect the Apostle ascribes the knowledge of Sin to the Law. The Law exceeds the light of Nature as to the discovery of Sin, in a double respect.

1. The Law discovers more Sins than the meer light of Nature could, *I had not known sin, saith the Apostle, unless the law had said, Thou*

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Thou shalt not covet. He had not known the sinfulness of the inward motions to Sin, at least such of them as go before the consent of the will; the *motus primo primi*, as the Schools call them.

2. The Law makes a more full and clear discovery of those very Sins which were in some measure known by the light of Nature.

(3.) The light of the Gospel goes yet further in the discovery of Sin, and in some respects as much exceeds the Law herein, as the Law doth the light of Nature. For,

1. The light of the Gospel, as 'tis far greater and clearer, so 'tis of a more piercing and penetrating nature to find out and discover Sin, as the Noon-day light looks into many a dark corner, and exposeth those things to our view which before could not be discerned.

2. Gospel Administrations are accompanied with a more full Effusion of the Spirit than was ordinarily under the Law. Now one special part of the Spirit's work being to convince of Sin, we may well conclude that the Spirit's Discovery and Convictions of Sin under the Gospel are more full and effectual.

John 16.8.

3. The Gospel furnisheth us with several Glasses in which we may behold Sin represented to us in a more lively manner than by the Law alone; and this, whether we consider the filthiness or the heinousness of

Sin. These Glasses are the Holiness, and the Justice of God. The Holiness of God is so displayed and set forth in the Doctrine of the Gospel, and in the Life of Christ, as never before. Hence it is that the Scripture seems so to speak of this matter, as if God were little known until Christ by his Heavenly Doctrine and Holy Conversation revealed him. No

John 1. 18. *man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him. He that seeth me, seeth him that sent me; I am come as a light into the world, that whosoever believeth in me, should not abide in darkness. No man knoweth the Father but the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.*

John 12. 45, 46. *And the Apostle discoursing of the Glory and Excellency of the Evangelical Administration beyond the Legal, saith, That whereas they of old had a vail upon their Hearts, and saw things but darkly, we all with open face as in a glass behold the glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ. And that he there chiefly intends the Glory of his Holiness, we may collect from what followeth; and we are changed, saith he, into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. Now contraries affording mutual light to one another, the more we discern of the Holiness of God, the more filthy and loathsome will Sin appear to us. This we see exemplified in the Prophet*

Mat. 11. 27. *Isaiah, who when he had seen the Lord*

2 Cor. 3. 18. *sitting*

sitting upon his Throne, and heard his Holiness proclaimed by one of the Seraphims, crying, *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory*; in the sense of his sinfulness he cries out, *Wo is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips.*

2. Another Glass to behold Sin in, is the Justice and Severity of God against Sin. As the Holiness of God shews us the filthiness of Sin, so doth his Justice and Severity shew us the heinousness and abominable nature of it. But now the Justice and Severity of God against Sin was never so much discovered by all the dreadful Threatnings of the Law, and terrible Judgments that have been inflicted upon Sinners ever since the Fall of *Adam* to this day, nor will ever be so much discovered by all the Sufferings of Millions in Hell to Eternity, as by what God for our Sins hath laid upon his own Eternal and most dearly beloved Son, who is over all God blessed for ever. The reason hereof is manifest and undeniable; for the Creature will never be able fully to satisfy the Justice of God by its endless Sufferings in Hell; if it could, why might it not be released, and let out of Prison? But Christ hath made full satisfaction to his Father's Justice; so that we have in that satisfaction which he hath presented to his Father, in that satisfaction of infinite value, and in that alone, an exact and adequate measure by which we may take the full dimensions of the heinousness of Man's Sin.

Indeed

Indeed what higher thing is imaginable by which we might be led to the sight of the heinousness of Sin, than that unparallell'd severity of the most Righteous Judge of all the Earth against it, which induced him to lay such a weight of punishment upon his only begotten Son, who is of the same Divine Essence with himself, when having taken our Nature on him, he undertook to bear what was due to us for our Sins. By what hath been said, we see that the Gospel not only discovers Sin, but also doth it in a very signal way, making such lively representations of the filthiness and heinousness thereof, as neither the light of Nature, nor the Law of God, nor all the dreadful Examples of God's Justice and Severity that ever have been, or ever shall be, can make.

Let us now in the next place add hereunto, That men are naturally most unwilling to see their Sins, and to be convinced of them; and then it may be presumed we will easily grant, that the light must in that respect be very unacceptable to them. Such is every man's natural Pride and Self-love, that he hath no mind to know how bad he is. He is willing, if it be possible, to shut his Eyes against his own deformities, that he may be able to hold up a good Opinion of himself. Besides, as men desire not to know too much of their own defects, so they would not have them known to others. Seeing therefore the same light that discovers them to themselves, doth

doth also lay them open to others; it is a thing not at all strange, that men, as long as they are wicked, and indulge themselves in Sin, should be no great Friends to the light. It concerns those who have bad Wares, to get them into dark Shops, which may not discover the faultiness of them. And so much of that first thing, The light, especially that of the Gospel, makes discovery of mens Sin, and that is it which they cannot endure.

2. The light of the Gospel doth not only discover mens sin, but calls upon them to leave it. *Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand*, was the substance of his Preaching who prepared the way for Christ, and ushered in Evangelical light. Though God never in the least approved of Sin, yet in former Ages before the coming of his Son into the World, he much winked at it, at least in the Gentile World; but now he commandeth all men every where to repent. He lets the World know, that in times of Gospel-light men must not expect that patience and forbearance at his hands, which he was pleased to exercise towards those who lived in darker Ages, and times of Ignorance. Barren Trees might long stand before, but now the Ax is laid to the root of the tree, and every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, shall be hewen down and cast into the fire. The main Errand and Design of the Gospel is, that men be turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. To this purpose

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Mat. 3. 2.

Acts 16.
30.

Mat. 3. 10.

Acts 26.
18.

Rom. 13. is that of the Apostle, *The night is far spent,*
 12, 13, 14. *the day is at hand ; let us therefore cast off the*
works of darkness, and put on the armour of
light ; let us walk honestly as in the day, not in
rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and
wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put
ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provi-
sion for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof. And
 Tit. 2. 11, again, *The Grace of God that bringeth salvation,*
 12. *bath appeared unto all men, teaching us, that*
denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should
live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present
world. And let every one that nameth the name
 2 Tim. 2. *of Christ, depart from iniquity. But this is*
 19. *that which the corrupt Heart of man can*
least of all endure. Men are unwilling to
see their Sins, but much more unwilling to
forake them. Whence else are those excuses
which many frame when they are invited to
come unto Christ ? One is engaged in this
business, and it must be dispatched ; he must
be dispensed with till it be over. Another is
engaged in that Affair, and he is not at lei-
 Luke 14. *sure. Whence else are those downright and*
 18, 19, 20. *peremptory refusals ? Ye will not come to me*
 Joh. 5. 40. *that ye might have life. Yea, you would not*
be gained and prevailed with to come by
the largest Proffers, by the most rich and ex-
cellent Promises. The greatest Love and
Tenderness, the most Compassionate Solici-
tations and Importunities, are not able to
overcome them into a willingness ; what to
do ? To be undone ? No, to be made for
ever ; to be gathered under the Wings of
 Christ's

Christ's most tender Care and Love, that they might be everlastingly Happy in the Fruition of him. That Sin is the cause of this peremptory refusal, cannot be denied; for nothing but Sin could so bewitch and transport them, that they should with so much obstinacy stand in their own light, wilfully thrust away from themselves Everlasting Life, and forsake their own Mercies. 'Tis agreed on, that all men naturally desire happiness; 'tis Nature's Language, *Who will shew us any good?* Could men therefore reject Eternal Happiness and Glory upon any other Consideration, than that the Terms on which 'tis offered seem to be too hard? They must part with their Sins if they will be happy; and O how hard a saying is this to Flesh and Blood! The Friendship which is between the heart of man and sin, being so strict and entire, can that light of the Gospel be welcome to him, whose Errand from Heaven is to make an Everlasting Separation between him and his Sins? Most clear it is, that wicked men, while such, cannot abide the light; and that however they may endeavour to cover over their Enmity against it with other pretensions, yet the true reason why they hate it, is the wickedness of their hearts and lives; they therefore hate it because their deeds are evil, as our Saviour gives us an account of the ground of their hatred thereof.

Psal. 4. 6.

But

But it may here be objected, That the Holy Scriptures elsewhere seem to give other reasons of mens not entertaining the light of the Gospel. Sometimes they seem to impute it to the sublimity, and to the mysterious Nature of the great Truths contained in the Gospel. *The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.* Sometimes the Scriptures impute it to the subtilty and malice of Satan darkening the minds of men. *If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost, in whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ should shine unto them.* And lastly, otherwhile the Scriptures speak of God's concealing the Mysteries of the Gospel from some men; so our Saviour speaking to his Father, saith, *Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent.* There being also these other reasons of mens not embracing the light of the Gospel, how is it that our Saviour seems to lay the whole stress of this matter upon this, that mens deeds are evil? To this I answer,

1 Cor. 2.
14.

2 Cor. 4.
3, 4.

Mat. 11.
25.

1. That it is not necessary that we should so understand our Saviour, as if he intended to make man's sin the sole or only cause why he hates the light, but one principal cause. And that 'tis a principal cause thereof, hath already appeared from what hath been spoken, and will yet more fully appear

appear by what shall be further spoken in answer to the Objections. Wherefore,

2. Though there may be some other causes of mens hating the light, and preferring dark-before it ; yet they may for the most part be some way or other resolved into this which our Saviour here mentioneth. Other things may concur sometimes, but there is scarce any thing that hath so general and almost so perpetual an influence upon mens hating, declining, running away from, opposing, and rejecting the light, as man's Sin. That mostly all other causes may be resolved into this, I shall endeavour to shew, in answer to the forementioned Objections.

As to the first of them, 'tis most true, that in Spiritual things there is a great disproportion between the Intellective Faculty as now 'tis since the Fall, and the Object. The Mysteries of the Gospel are high and sublime ; our understanding is dark, weak, and shallow. But,

1. Whence came this disproportion ? Was it not very much from the sin of man at first, who put out his own Eyes, wounded his Intellectuals, and weakened his natural Powers ? It cannot be denied but that *Adam* in the state of Innocency and Integrity, though he could not have found out those deep Mysteries of the Gospel concerning our Redemption by Christ, and the things relating thereunto, they being things that have

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no natural cause from whence the highest created reason might deduce or collect them ; and many of them being things above Nature, and such as depend meerly upon the good pleasure of God unknown to us, until by himself revealed ; I say, though *Adam* could not by the strength of his Reason and Natural Abilities have found out these deep things, yet it cannot be denied that if these things had been propounded to *Adam* to be assented to, and believed upon the Authority of God revealing them, he both could and would most readily have assented to them, because he had both a power and a readiness of mind to believe whatsoever truth God should reveal. And this is all that in these matters God requires of us. The deep things of the Gospel are not propounded to us to be perfectly understood and comprehended by us ; but they being unfathomable by the longest Line of our Reason, all that God expects from us, is, that we give our assent to them, and believe them ; and this only because he who can neither be deceived nor deceive, hath revealed them. But as the case now stands with us since the Fall, though these things are most clearly revealed, and as such propounded to us, yet we will not believe them, they are foolishness to us, as the Apostle speaks. So miserably are our Minds taken up and prepossessed with a proud and fond Opinion of our selves, of our own natural Ability to judge of these things, with false Principles, with inveterate Prejudices,

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Judices, and rank Enmity against the Truth, and what not? that we shut out the light, and forbid it entertainment with us.

2. Add hereunto, that the perverseness and stubbornness of the Will, the irregularity, the inordinate propensions, and impetuous motions of the Affections and sensual Appetite, do not a little hinder the reception of Spiritual Truths into the Understanding. For as bad Meats, as crude and inconcocted Humours in the Stomach, send up noisome vapours into the Head, clouding the Mind, discomposing the Brain, and disturbing the Fancy; so the sinful Distempers, the inordinate Passions, the unruly and rebellious disorders of the inferior Faculties, send up such fumes into the higher Region of the Soul, as darken the Understanding, as incline and dispose the Mind to embrace what is most suitable to the corrupt bent of the Will and Affections, and to reject the contrary.

Aristotle's censure of young Men as incompetent Auditors of the Precepts of Moral Philosophy, hath more reason in it than at first appears. The strength of their Lusts and Passions doth not only make them unwilling to come under the severity of Moral Precepts in their Practice and Conversation, but likewise much obstruct the passage of those severer Truths into their Understandings. 'Tis no easy matter to gain the assent of the Understanding to those practical Truths which a man hath no mind to be ordered by. Men will be very ingenious to invent, and

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very facil and easy to be prevailed with to entertain reasons against that, which, in respect of the contrary byass of their Wills, they would not have to be truth: As 'tis most true on the one side, *Quid nimis miseri volumus, hoc facile credimus.* A weak and dark Argument shall have strength and evidence enough to persuade us of the truth of that which we have a mind to believe: So on the other side, the most clear and demonstrative Arguments in the World shall not easily persuade us, where we are unwilling to be persuaded.

Neither is it thus only in matters of Morality, but much more in spiritual things, as the corrupt Heart of man is naturally at a far greater remoteness and distance from them. Upon this ground it seems to be that Solomon, who could best speak to that Argument, tells us, *That the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.* When a man's heart is seasoned with the fear of God, and in some measure purged from corrupt Affections; when 'tis subdued unto God, and made yielding and pliable to his Will, then is a man fit to receive the Law from his mouth and then is the Heart a meet Vessel to receive the rich and invaluable treasure of heavenly Wisdom. And so much in answer to the first Objection.

I go on to the second; That our not entertaining the light, seems to be put upon Satan's score. And here, though Satan's malice

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malice and guile be nothing the less, 'tis ap-
parent that this cause may also in great
part be resolved into man's sin and wicked-
ness. How comes it to pass, that Satan hath
such advantage against man in this matter?
whence is it that he can so easily beseech
men, prejudice them against the light of
the Gospel, keep them in darkness, and lead
them blindfold to Hell, as the Prophet led
the Army of the Syrians into Samaria? Is it
not because he finds them pre-engaged in
sinful Courses, from which they cannot ex-
clude to be taken off? Is it not because he
finds them resolved to comply with their
Lusts, and corrupt Affections, the granting
of which is not to be gain-sayed, they can
not but rise were it not that he finds in mens
hearts such fit matter to work upon, laid in
before, and prepared to his hands, he could
not so easily delude and blind them to their
ruine. *Satan* had as much malice against
Christ, and did with the greatest rage and
violence assault him, and endeavour to break
in upon him, but he could not do it, as
finding nothing within to bid him welcome.
*The Prince of this world cometh, saith he, and
findeth nothing in me.* *Nihil sui operis iniqua
refugium* saith *St. Hieron.* in his Epistle to *Al-
gasta*? nothing of his own Work, nor im-
pressions which he himself hath made, nor
trappings which he himself hath left behind
him; nothing at all on which to ground an
Accusation, or to fasten a Temptation. The
words may comprehend both, though indeed
but of men. For where D 2 there are three

Joh. 14. 31.
32

Joh. 14. 31.

D 2

three

Prov. 25.
28.

the former seems as if be in that place chiefly intended. Let *Satan* come to any of us when he will, he is sure to find something of his own. Something of his own work, something of his own image which he hath stampt upon us, something that he may lay claim to as his, something of his party that will own him, and side with him. Hence the different issue of Christ's Temptations and ours. When *Satan* came to assault him, he found his Soul as an impregnable Castle, well fortified on every quarter, clear and heavenly light without any mixture of darkness in the understanding, perfect holiness in the Will, exact regularity and composedness in the Affections; all of one accord within, to make resistance, so as it was impossible for him to get possession. When he comes to us, he finds the Soul as a city *that is broken down, and without walls*, as *Solomon* speaks. And he finds a treacherous party within, that is ready to invite him, that would gladly set open the Gates to him, and betray all into his hands, were the Soul otherwise never so well fortified. And thus we see how far all the mischief that *Satan* doth us, may be resolved into our own sin. 'Tis true, he blinds us, but 'tis because we have no mind to see; he closeth our Eyes against the light of the Gospel, but he finds us endeavouring to close our own Eyes, and glad of any assistance from him to do it more effectually. In a word, he shuts out the light, that it shine not in upon us to our conviction, humiliation and

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and conversion, but he makes him shuttings
 do to of our own darkniels, prejudices,
 false Principles, and corrupt Affections.

I now proceed to the third Objection taken from *Math. 13. 35* where God himself is said: to hide the Mysteries of his Gospel from the wise and prudent. Before I lay any thing to this Objection, I must premise, That God in this matter (as in other things) hath a Prerogative which he makes use of, and according to which he acts, where, and when he sees good. He being the Supreme Lord of Heaven and Earth, as our Saviour styles him in the place whence this Objection is taken, may dispose of the knowledge of the Mysteries of his Kingdom as he pleaseth, freely vouchsafing it to some, and withholding it from others. For what can restrain him, but that he may do with his own as he pleaseth? as in the person of the Householder he argues. This good pleasure of God is it into which our Saviour expressly resolveth his hiding the Mysteries of the Gospel from the wise and prudent. *Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes; even so father, for so it seemeth good in thy sight.*

*Math. 20.
15.*

*Math. 13.
35.*

So then, reserving unto God his Prerogative, I Answer, That yet however God's hiding the Mysteries of the Gospel from men, may very much, and in many cases, though not universally, be resolved into the sins of men. For whereas there are chiefly

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three ways by which God may be said to hide the Mysteries of the Gospel from men; namely, by denying to them, or removing from them the means of knowledge; or by with-holding the effectual influences and operation of his Spirit to accompany the means; or by permitting Satan to blind them; Upon consideration of the matter we shall find, That the sins of men have frequently very much to do therein, and contribute much towards it; though even here the good pleasure of God must also be acknowledged, who permits it so to be, and doth not powerfully interpose to hinder it, as he might do if he saw good.

If God deny the Gospel to men, 'tis often through their thrusting it away, and keeping it off from themselves, when 'tis approaching towards them. How often do men oppose themselves against it! How often do men decline the light, and chuse to live in places of darkness, where there are no means, or as good as no means of knowledge! So if God remove the Gospel from a People, is it not most commonly not only for their own sin, but by their sin that 'tis removed? God for their unfruitfulness and unthankfulness, for their manifold sins against the Gospel, most righteously gives them up to be active and instrumental themselves in putting out the light, and sending the Gospel far away from themselves.

For whereas there are chiefly
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If 2.

2. If God, continuing the Gospel, and the means of Grace to a People, withhold the powerful influences and co-operation of his Spirit, what is this in effect, but a leaving them to themselves, suffering their lusts, prejudices, love of sin, and hatred of holiness, so far to prevail in them, as to shut and bar up the Soul, and forcibly to keep out the light, or so far to weaken the influences and impressions of it, as nothing to purpose is done upon them.

3. If God hide the Mysteries of his Kingdom from them by giving them up to Satan to be blinded and deluded by him, the thing is still upon the matter one and the same; for as hath been at large shewed, Satan effects his purpose much by their own sin, and makes use of their Corruptions as the Weapons of his warfare against the Soul, to keep it under the power of darkness.

Now to apply what hath been spoken.

U S E I.

This gives us a true account of the reason of several Practices of the Church of Rome.

As 1st. Of their vilifying and disparaging the Holy Scriptures as defective and imperfect, as obscure and uncertain, and no better than a Nose of wax that may be turned any

way at pleasure, that may be moulded and shaped to every man's fancy, as one of that Party wickedly and profanely reproacheth it. In short; Their making the word written insufficient to inform us touching the matters of our belief and practice, and to lead us in the way to Heaven, without the help and Supplement of Human Traditions.

2. Of their refusing to bring their Doctrines, Worship and Practices, to the Test and Touchstone of the Holy Scriptures alone; and of their setting up another pretended Infallible Judge of Controversies, not admitting the Scriptures to be the common Umpire and Determiner of them.

3. Of their shutting up the Book of the Holy Scriptures, and forbidding it to be read by the People, so taking away from them the Key of Knowledge. What's the reason of these their ungodly and abominable Practices, but this, *He that doth evil, hateth the light, and cometh not to it, lest his deeds should be reproved*? Their Principles are unsound and rotten, wicked and abominable, their Doctrine false, their Worship Idolatrous, their Usages vain and superstitious, and therefore they hate the light of the Scriptures that discovers their Errors, Cheats and Jugglings; therefore they decline the light, and run away from it; they defame and reproach it; they shut it up, and imprison it; they do what they can to extinguish it,

it, and keep men in darkness wheresoever they have power to do it. But blessed be God that we are not yet brought into Bondage by them; they have not yet prevailed to deprive us of the light of the Gospel; we have free access to the Holy Scriptures; the Bible lies open before us in our Mother-tongue. O! may we never by our unthankfulness, our not improving the mercies we enjoy, and our other Sins, so far provoke God, as that he should suffer the Land of our Nativity to be again overspread with that worse than Egyptian darkness.

U.S. Es. 2. all over the land.

This discovers the true reason why many that frequent Publick Ordinances, love and affect such Preaching only as comes not too near the Conscience, meddles not with their spiritual estate, toucheth not their own particular darling and beloved sins. A smooth and general Discourse that descends not to the concernments of their own Souls; or it may be, a serious and smart Sermon, that reproves the sins of the Age, or the sins of some particular Persons known to them, those sins which they themselves are not guilty of; all this they can hear with much patience, and perhaps with some delight, as Herod is said to have heard John Baptist gladly. But if any man shall lay open, and set before them the great evil of their own sins, the

Mat. 6. 16.

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unsoundness of their spiritual Estate; while they continue in them, the extreme danger of their present condition, the absolute and indispensable necessity of Regeneration, of sincere and universal Repentance, of sound Conversion, in order to Salvation; if a man shall discourse of our natural proneness to flatter and deceive our selves in these important matters, of our utter unwillingness to know the worst of our selves, and to be truly acquainted with the state of our Souls; of the small number of such as shall be saved; in comparison of them that perish; of the great multitude of them that rest in the outward formalities of Religion, and never go further, and of such as have a name to live, but are dead; I say, if any man shall discourse of these things, how unacceptable and displeasing, how irksome and tedious would it be to many of his Hearers? How would they long to be rid of such a man? hardly forbearing to say of him, as *Abah* did of *Micabiah*, *I hate this man, because he never prophesied good of me, but evil.* For such plain dealing, a man perhaps might be treated as kindly by some, as the Prophet *Amos* was by *Amaziah*. Go, *say* away, saith he, *into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there; but prophesy no more at Bethel.* Now whence is all this, and what other account can be given of it, but that in my Text, *Every one that doth evil, burneth the light, and cometh not to it, lest his deed should be reproved.* To live long only maketh

Amos 7.

13. 33. 14. 15.

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U S E 3.

This may also acquaint us with the reason why many vicious and ungodly People come so seldom to this place. Their Deeds are evil, their Works are the Works of darkness, and therefore they hate the light. A woful Snare, a sad Intanglement it is in which they are. They hate the light, and come not to it, because their deeds are evil; and yet as long as they come not to the light, they are never likely to be better. But do these People think all is well, while withdrawing themselves from the light, they can make a shift to avoid the sight of their sin and misery, and keep their Consciences asleep? Let them not deceive themselves; the time is coming, when the light will break in upon them, do they what they can to keep it out; *When God will open their eyes, Psal. 50. and set their feet in order before them,* as he threatens the wicked man, the obstinate and impenitent sinner. What shall I say to persuade these Sons of *Japhet*, or rather Sons of *Belial*, to dwell in the Tents of *Shem*, to come to the House of God, and join themselves to the Assemblies of his People? Though I have small hopes that I shall be able to say any thing that may work upon people so much estranged from God, and so miserably hardened in their sins; yet over and above what hath been said, I shall recommend

The Second Sermon.

mend these two things to the serious consideration of such persons, if any of them be at present here; for though we have little of their company here, yet I know not, but that some of them may now and then have the curiosity, though not the Religion, to look within these Doors, and drop in amongst us.

Let them consider, That the longer they shall shut the light, and hide their eyes from their sins, the more frightful and formidable will the view of them be, when God shall open their eyes. Such Armies of their sins, and such fearful Aggravations of them, will then appear, as will fill them with horror and amazement, and without God's infinite mercy hurry them into the Gulf of utter despair. But if this be not enough to fright them out of their profaneness; Let them consider,

Gen. 28.
17.

2dly, That they who will not come to the light here, must never expect to be partakers of the inheritance among the Saints in light hereafter. The house of God is the gate of Heaven, as Jacob called it. Through this is the entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven; and therefore all they who out of Profaneness and Irreligion shut themselves out of the Church here, shut themselves out of Heaven; and they who wickedly and profanely exclude themselves from the Assemblies of God's People here, must not look to

to be admitted into the City of the living
 God, the heavenly Jerusalem, the general
 Assembly, and Church of the First-born
 which are written in Heaven. A fearful
 thing to consider it all ye that shud the Word
 and Ordinances of God, that in your hearts
 say to the Almighty, Depart from us, we
 desire not the knowledge of thy ways, as the
 wicked man is described. If you will not
 acquaint your selves with God here, you
 must never look to enjoy him hereafter, if in
 effect you bid him depart from you, what
 else can you expect from him, but to hear
 that dreadful and confounding Sentence,
 Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting
 fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels.
 Tremble at the Thoughts of such
 Sentence, and do not by your obstinate
 Profaneness and Irreligion, by your con-
 tempt of the House, Word, and Ordina-
 nces of God, willfully bring it upon your
 selves in the Prophets in the New, and
 the Apostles in the New Testament, the
 Christ himself. It is impossible that we
 should do our duty sincerely, and not
 incur the displeasure of some thereby.
 If the light be so unacceptable to wicked
 men, if they hate it, and cannot endure
 it, then may they hence inform themselves
 what measure they may expect from the
 wicked World, whose Office and Calling it
 is to hold forth the light to others. If in-
 deed they study to comply with men in
 their sins, if they resolve to say nothing
 but

Job 21. 14.

Isa. 6. 10.

To Conclude ; Seeing thus it is ; seeing we cannot please wicked men , unless we will displease God , let the Conscience of having sincerely endeavoured to approve our heart to God , and to give no just offence to men , bear us up , and support , arm and fortify us against all the harsh Censures , and all the causeless and unjust Clamours of the World.

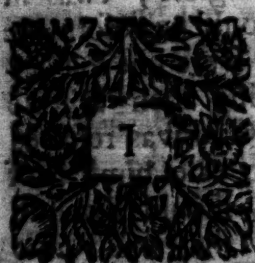
The

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The Third Sermon.

J E R. XIII. 23.

*Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or
the Leopard his spots? then may ye
also do good that are accustomed to
do evil.*



IN these words we have a short but very satisfactory account of the Ground of God's severe proceedings against the Jews for their sins. God had long born with them, he had used all sorts of means to reclaim them: He had sometimes been drawing them by the Cords of a Man, with Bands of Love; he had been trying to win them by kindness; he *was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and he laid meat unto them.* He had treated them with that gentleness and kindness which is wont to work upon Irrational Creatures, and make the very brute Beasts, tame, gentle, and tractable; For even

Hos. iii. 4.

Isa. 1. 3.

the Ox knoweth his owner, and the Ass his master's crib. Otherwhile he had been trying whether severity might take any better effect upon them; he had been correcting them first more favourably, and with much lenity, afterwards more sharply and severely; and together with other means, he had been still warning, admonishing, exhorting, reproving, threatening them by his Prophets, and setting before them the Comforts and Rewards of Repentance and Obedience, and the sad consequents and issues of their disobedience, in case they should still go on in their Sin and Impenitency. But none of these things would work upon them; through long custom and continuance in sin, they were now become incorrigible; 'twas in vain to expect that they should be reformed: All means and endeavours were but lost upon them. Wherefore seeing their Disease appeared to be incurable, God was resolved to be rid of them, and to ease himself of them once for all. They should dwell in his Land no longer, away they must into Captivity, and such a Captivity as should not only remove them far from the Land of their Nativity, but scatter them up and down, and disperse them from one another. So we have their Sin and Punishment set forth in the words of the Text, and the following Verse; *Can the Ethiopian change his skin; or the Leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil. Therefore will I scatter them as the stubble that passeth away by the wind of the wilderness.* Be-

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Before I come to the words, we may by the way observe, That 'tis a most woful condition to be still incorrigible under all means applied to humble and reform us. The misery of such a people lies in these two things.

1. That God is wont to give up such a people to themselves, to walk in the way of their own Hearts. He saith of them, as of the Jews, *Why should ye be stricken any more? Ye will revolt more and more;* and as of Ephraim, *Ephraim is joyned to Idols; let him alone;* he is so nearly joined, and intirely united to them in his Affections, that nothing will withdraw him from them; therefore let him alone, let him take his course, and see what will come of it in the end. And though this may seem to be no great evil, but rather an advantage, and a very desirable liberty in the Judgment of the Sinner, who cannot endure to be curbed or restrained; yet 'tis a very heavy Judgment, and so much worse than any Affliction whatsoever, as the evil of sin is worse than the evil of punishment. And so God speaks of this his Dispensation in words full of high Indignation and displeasure; *My people would not hearken to my voice, and Israel would none of me; so I gave them up to their own hearts lusts, and they walked in their own counsels.* As if he had said, I met with them, and was avenged of them for their wretched contempt of me; I let them go on, and suffered them to

Isa. 1. 5.

Prov. 1.

Hof. 4. 17.

Psal. 81.

11, 12.

b; as vicious and profligate, as filthy and abominable, as they had a mind to be.

2. Another thing in which lies the Misery of an incorrigible people is, that they are now ripe for Ruine, or for some terrible Judgment. *Because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged, (said God to Jerusalem) that is, Because I used all fit means to purge and reform thee; and yet still thou wallowest in thy filthiness and lewdness, thou art incorrigible; therefore thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness till I have caused my fury to rest upon thee. He that being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.* An incorrigible Person, whom no reproofs will work upon, is next door to destruction, to unavoidable destruction, if still he go on; he shall suddenly be destroyed, without remedy; nothing shall plead for him, or interpose in his behalf to rescue him from destruction. In the 2 Chron. 36. 14, 15, 16, 17. God by the Penman of that Book sets forth the great sins of Judah and Jerusalem, the means he was pleas'd to make use of to reduce them to obedience, their incorrigibleness under those means; and lastly, the terrible Judgments which thereupon he brought upon them. All the chief of the Priests and the People transgressed very much, after the Abominations of the Heathen, and polluted the House of the Lord which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up

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up betimes and sending, because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling-place; but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his Prophets, until the wrath of God arose against his People, till there was no remedy; and what was at length the issue of this their incorrigibleness and stubbornness? That follows in the next words; therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man or blind that stooped for age. And as the incorrigibleness of this stubborn and stiff-necked people brought the Chaldees upon them; so afterwards the like incorrigibleness brought the Romans upon their Posterity, to their utter ruin, and final desolation; for 'tis their incorrigibleness that our Saviour makes the fore-runner and cause of their destruction by the Romans. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the Prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together within thee, even as an hen gathereth her chickens under her wings; and ye would not; therefore your house is left unto you desolate. Take notice of this, and lay it to heart all you that have been often reprov'd for your sins, and yet you still harden your Necks; unto whom many reasonable Admonitions, and wholesome Counsels and Advices have been tender'd, but you have stopp'd your Ears against them; who have often smarted for your sins, and yet you love

Mat. 23.
37, 38.

The Third Sermon.

them still, and delight in them as much as ever you did ; you that have been often in the Furnace of Affliction , and yet your Dross is not separated from you ; I say, take notice of the woful condition of incorrigible Sinners, and consider what awaits you, and will certainly be your portion, unless by Repentance you speedily prevent it.

You unteachable and incorrigible Children, whom no Admonitions or Chastisements will reduce to that Dutifulness, humble Submission and Obedience which you owe to your Parents ; tremble at the thoughts of what may be coming upon you for your sin. You who tread in the steps of *Hophni* and *Phineas*, both in respect of your other sins, and in respect of your obstinate carriage when you are reprov'd for them, can you without horror read or hear what the Spirit of God saith concerning them ?

1 Sam. 2.
25.

They hearkned not to the voice of their father, because the Lord would slay them. You whose lewd and ungodly Conversation hath been often reprov'd and condemned in the Ministry of the Word, and yet you are still insensible of your danger, and proceed still in your old ways, and walk in the imagination of your heart, to add drunkenness to thirst ; consider what befel such as you are. *They refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears that they should not hear. Yea, they made their heart as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the word which the Lord sent by his Prophets : therefore came a*

Zech. 7.

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12.

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The Third Sermon.

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great wrath from the Lord of Hosts. Therefore it is come to pass, that as he cried, and they would not bear; so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the Lord of Hosts.

You whom no Counsels or Persuasions can prevail with to leave your lewd and graceless Companions ——— You, that notwithstanding all that can be said or done to keep you in, and withhold you from your wicked Associates, say still with that lewd and ungovernable generation, *There is no hope. No, I have loved strangers, and after them will I go:* Consider with fear and trembling what the Prophet said to *Amaziah*, who stopt his Ears against good advice. *By this I know that God hath determined to destroy thee, because thou hast not hearkened to my counsel. I do not say God hath determined to destroy you also, I take not upon me to be so well acquainted with God's secret purposes; but this I say, you are at present in the high-way to destruction, and you have great cause to fear lest God destroy you, as he hath done by other such incorrigible persons as you are. If you still continue to be like others, who have been destroyed for the same sins, what reason have you to expect more favour than they had? God is not changed, he is still the same, his hatred of sin, his justice and severity against Sin, is still as great as ever it was.*

Jer. 2. 29.

2 Chron. 25. 16.

And so much concerning that Observation. I come now to that which I chiefly intended.

The Third Sermon.

Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the Leopard his spots? That is, they cannot; no Art or Labour can effect it. Wash and rub the Skin of the *Ethiopian* while you will, it will retain its natural hew; you may sooner rub away the Skin, than alter the colour of it; And so for those spots with which Nature hath mark'd the Leopard, you may by much tampering destroy the subject of them, but the subject remaining, you can never get out the spots. And little less difficulty there is in removing those habitual Inclinations to Sin, which long custom hath produced: The case is much alike, to wash a Blackamoor white, and to get him to do good that is accustomed to do evil. So then 'tis a Proverbial comparison, by which is signified the extreme difficulty of delivering a Man from those vicious impressions which custom in sin hath made upon him. And that's the thing which I purpose to treat of.

Custom in sin makes it very difficult to leave sin. There needs little other proof hereof than our own Experience. Though some vicious Persons, who are taken in hand, and dealt with betimes, may be more easily drawn off from their sinful courses, yet how rare a thing is it to see any man recovered, who hath long been exercised in a trade of sin! Shall you easily prevail with the intemperate, or lustful, or ambitious, or covetous person, to leave those paths of sin which have been long trodden by them? So great is the force of custom in sin, that men will by no

Argu-

Arguments be persuaded to forsake those long-continued sinful practices, which are continually attended with so many visible and great inconveniences, as one would think were sufficient to make any man weary of such courses.

Take for an instance but a wandring Beggar, that necessarily undergoes many hardships, and runs many hazards in that irregular and wicked course of life which he hath been wonted to, and you shall in vain tempt him to leave it by the best provisions and accommodations which you can proffer him in any settled way of honest Employment.

Or take a nearer instance in the same kind; When almost do you ever see one of our poor people whose hands refuse to labour, and who make a trade of begging from Door to Door; I say, when almost do you see any such Person reclaimed, and brought to endeavour to get his Living in any honest and laborious Calling? I deny not, but 'tis possible there may be instances of some such that have been reduced to an orderly course of life; but I believe such instances are very rare, especially of those who have from their Childhood been addicted to that disorderly course, as too many are; the only Breeding and Education which their Parents give them, being to teach them how to eat the Bread of Idleness, and live upon the Charity of others, if that may be called Charity which is bestowed upon such people.

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The grounds of this point are these.

1. Custom begets a strong, fixed and habitual Inclination to sin. Hence a Man is ever in a readiness to yield to, and comply with any Temptation to that sin unto which he hath been accustomed. No sooner is occasion offered, but it meets with a preparation of heart to embrace it. Instead of preparing to resist Temptations when they begin to approach, and offer themselves, he that hath been accustomed to sin will meet them half way, invite them to come on, and bid them welcome; instead of declining Temptations, he will seek after them, and studiously make provision for his Lusts. For custom is now become another Nature to him, and he seems to enjoy himself no longer than he is complying with it. To be divorc'd and separated from such sins, is a most grievous thing; 'tis as the pulling out of a right Eye, or the cutting off of a right Hand.

2. Custom in sin brings on delight in sin; the actions that are natural, are mostly accompanied with some pleasure: And so are sinful actions, when custom hath made them familiar to us, and given them, as it were, the stamp of Nature. 'Tis strange that a Man should be sensible of any pleasure or delight at all in some sins; and yet through custom there is that content and complacency in them, that it is as death to forsake them. To sit in an obscure Alehouse, and
to

to be continually pouring in that which to a sober Man would be little better than a Portion ; to spend days and nights in a dark hole amidst the stink of Vomits and Spewings round about, to the blasting of a Man's Reputation, the impairing of his Health, the mis-spending of his time, and the wasting away of that which it may be Wife and Children want at home ; who would think there should be any content in such a Life ? And yet there are, who by custom have made it so pleasurable to them, that they prefer it before all the contents and satisfactions that a fair House, a Table richly spread, and the Society of their nearest Relations can afford them, and whatever other advantages and accommodations might render their converse at home comfortable and delightful. If custom hath once made such base and dirty ways of sin pleasant, you shall in vain tempt them out of them, or endeavour to draw them off from them by the fairest and most taking proffers that you can make them.

3. Custom in sin blinds the mind, and corrupts the judgment, so that a man ceaseth to be a competent judge of the nature of things, and of the differences between good and evil. By degrees he is besotted, and comes to be in great measure deprived of the reason of a man ; so far hath sin darkened his understanding, and weakened his Intellectuals for judging of Spiritual things. He is given up to a reprobate mind, as the Rom. i. 28. Apostle

Apostle speaks ; he puts good for evil, and evil for good ; light for darkness, and darkness for light. And when the light of reason is darkened, and the Eye of the Soul is put out ; when the leading and governing Faculty of the Soul is thus depraved, it must needs be a difficult thing to draw a man off from those ways, the evil whereof he cannot discern, nor will be apprehensive of.

4. Custom in sin seareth the Conscience, and draws such a callus or brawniness over it, as it becomes insensible. At first there is some tenderness of Conscience, some reluctance, and shrinking back from those sins which after a frequent repetition and customary practice of them, a man makes no bones of, but smoothly swallows down. He that at first durst not tell a Lye, or if he were at any time overtaken, was wont to be much troubled afterwards ; yet upon a customary practice of that sin, will add Lyes to Lyes, and stand to them most impudently and obstinately : He that seemed to fear an Oath, will through customary Swearing arrive at that degree of insensibleness, that he will not stick to multiply Oaths, and Perjuries also, if need be, and all this without any touch of remorse, any gainsayings or grudgings of his Conscience. Now when a Man through custom in sin comes to that pass, that his Conscience is quiet, and doth not either interpose before the commission of sin to hinder him, molest and disturb his peace after-

afterwards, 'twill be no easy matter to disengage him from that sin.

Custom in sin doth consequently harden the heart against all means by which the Sinner should be reclaimed.

It hardens the heart against the Word. The threatnings thereof, and all the most dreadful denunciations of Judgments, make no impression upon such a Man's Heart; 'tis as Steel or Adamant that will not yield or relent.

Neither will the wholesome Counsels, Advices or Admonitions of Friends and Christian Acquaintance work upon it. He hath no sense of any thing which in that way is offered him for his good: His Ears are stop't against the voice of the Charmer, Charm he never so wisely.

3. He is fortified with Armour of Proof against all Providences, by which he might be stop't in his course of sin, or reduced from the Error of his ways. Let God oppose him in his sinful course, let him hedge up his ways with Thorns, or stand before him with a drawn Sword, all is one, on he will fearlessly and presumptuously, and adventure himself upon the thick Bosses of his Buckler.

6. Custom in Sin emboldens Satan to tempt. Where the Conscience is tender, and the Heart is sensible of the evil and danger of Sin, and where he hath been formerly resisted and repelled, there if he tempt, yet he doth it with less confidence of prevailing,

vailing, and with some degree of Cowardly Expectation of being worsted; but where he hath to do with those who have been long accustomed to the Sin he would again draw them into, he makes little question of prevailing, as knowing well the fearedness of their Consciences, the hardness of their Hearts, and their strong propensions to the sin unto which he is about to tempt them; as also remembering how often his Temptations in the same kind have already been successful.

7. By Custom in sin God is provoked to leave a man to himself, to the power of Satan, and the efficacy of Temptation; and in way of his righteous Judgment to give him up to a further degree of impenitency and hardness of heart.

Then let such as have been long accustomed to any ways of Sin, take heed that they make not account it will be an easy matter to leave those ways. You may be apt to think that you can come off from those your sinful courses at pleasure; that 'tis but to take up Resolutions against them, and you shall be disengaged and freed from them presently: But herein you would much deceive your self. 'Tis not so easy a matter to deliver your self from the power of that sin which you have been so long accustomed unto: When you address your self to endeavour to leave

leave it, you will find other work of it. You may take up Resolutions upon Resolutions, and yet you may be still where you were at first, as much enslaved to your Sin as ever, and as unable to resist any Temptation to it. They must be strong and firm Resolutions, and those frequently renewed, that will stand you in stead where Sin hath by custom gotten such possession of you: And besides, you must look higher than your own Resolutions, you must earnestly implore God's help against your self, so miserably brought under and subjected to the power of Sin. Never think to prevail against those Sins which Custom hath strengthened and confirmed in you, without much Prayer to God, great watchfulness over your self, and diligence in the use of all other means, whereby the power of Sin may be weakened.

U.S.E. 2. You must therefore acknowledge it to be a great Mercy, if you meet with Crosses and Afflictions in your sinful ways early, and before longer Custom in Sin hath produced those confirmed, radicated, and obstinate habits of Sin which cannot easily be removed. God is very gracious to some this way; he takes them up sharply, and chastens them severely betimes: They no sooner enter upon the ways of Sin, but he opposeth himself against them, and hedgeth up their way with Thorns. This is very grievous and afflicting

afflicting to our corrupt Nature, which can endure no restraint : But we little consider or understand how much we are obliged to God for his Care of us herein. How many others are there whom he suffers to go on in their Sins without check or controul, till they contract those strong habits of Sin which they are never rid of as long as they live ! Do you think your self hardly dealt with, that God doth not suffer you also to take your course, and make your self as vile here, and as miserable hereafter, as others ? 'Tis God's exceeding great kindness to you, that he imbibbers unto you the beginnings of Sin, and strews the first entrance into sinful ways with Briars and Prickles, so that you cannot go on, but you must hurt your self. It seems you would have liked it better, if the way to Hell had been strewed with Roses for you. Beware you do not misinterpret God's Providence : If he be pleased to use seasonable means to make you weary of the ways of Sin, before you are more hardened in them, count it a singular favour, and an effect of that his gracious care of you, for which you can never be enough thankful.

U S E 3.

This discovers the folly and danger of deferring Repentance, and especially of putting it off till the time of Sicknes, or till our Death-bed. The longer we defer Repentance, the more difficult will the business be, through

through so long custom in Sin. If you find it hard at present to think of leaving your Sins, what will it be hereafter when they will have taken deeper root in you, and when your habitual Inclinations to them will be stronger? And as for putting off Repentance till the time of Sicknels or Death; what wise Man would put off a work of the greatest Importance, and the most difficult work, and a work that will be still more difficult every day the longer 'tis put off; I say, what wise Man would put off such a work till that time, when he will be weakest and most unable to undertake it, and go thorough with it? Are the infirmities of Sicknels, are the pains and languishings of a Death-bed likely to make you stronger and abler for this work? Is that a fit season to be chosen beforehand for beginning to break and subdue those inveterate Corruptions in you that have been gathering strength all your days? Your greatest and most implacable Enemy, the Devil himself, could not direct you to the choice of a more unfit season for that business. And yet besides, who knows whether or no you shall then have any opportunity of endeavouring to do any thing in that great work which you put off till then, as if it were of all other the fittest season for it? Who can tell you but you may be so suddenly and violently surprized with Sicknels, and cut off, that you may have no time to bestow one serious Thought upon that Business, which is of no less Con-

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cernment to you than your Soul's Eternal Happiness or Misery? Or if you should not be so quickly taken away, yet who can tell but you may then be deprived of the use of Reason; and what then will become of this great business, which being put off till that time, must be then dispatch'd, or never?

U S E 4.

Eccl. 12.1.

This should admonish the younger sort to remember their Creator in the days of their youth, as Solomon counsels them. To consecrate their tender years to God, before custom of sin hath strengthened vicious Inclinations in them, and hardened their hearts against God. As 'tis much more acceptable to God, when we give him the First-fruits, when we offer up to him the flower of our age; so 'tis much more easy and comfortable for us: For hereby we prevent those habits of sin, which time and custom would beget, to our far greater trouble afterwards. Those Vices which in younger years discover themselves, are more easily pluck'd up, as young Weeds out of the Soil in which they have not as yet taken any deep root. Old habits of sin, so close do they stick to us, so deeply are they rooted in us, and so strongly and intricately are their Roots twisted together with our Nature, that the plucking of them up, is as the rooting up of a great Oak that hath the advantage of many years growth to settle it self in the ground. You who are young,

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if you be wise, create not so much trouble to your selves, as to let sin grow old and strong in you, before you break it off, or pluck it up by repentance.

U S E 5.

This should also prevail with Parents to be very careful of their Childrens Education, beginning to restrain and beat down sin in them in season, that so custom in sin, and all the sad effects thereof may be prevented. How happy had it been, both for many Parents and Children, if seasonable Restraints and Chastisements had been applied, before the customary practice of sin had made them obstinate and incorrigible! The neglect whereof, how much sorrow and heart-breaking doth it occasion to Parents, and how much sin and misery to Children! Nothing is more ordinary, than to hear the sad Complaints that Parents make of the stubbornness and untractableness of their Children, and of those sinful courses which they addict themselves unto, and cannot be drawn off from by all the means they can think of to reclaim them: But whom may too many Parents thank for it, rather than themselves, whose indulgence to them, or neglect of them in their tender years hath been the cause? They would not begin with them in season, while they were tender and pliable; and now they are by long practice of sin become stubborn and refractory: Then they

would not restrain them, and now they cannot do it. And what greater mischief can Parents do their Children, than by giving them the head, and laying the Reins on their neck when they are young, whereby they come to be irreclaimably and desperately hardened in sin when they grow up? While Parents complain of Children, may not Children as justly complain of Parents, that have by their neglect of them betrayed them to sin and Satan? Many such Children, when by their sins they have come to shameful ends, have most passionately cried out against their Parents, whose ill Example, or neglect to correct them, had brought them to that misery; and could we listen to the Language of those who are in Hell, there is no doubt but our ears would tingle to hear the lamentable Outcries and Curses of the Souls of undone Children, against those whose Parental Relation should have engaged them to have left no means untried for keeping them from that place of torment.

And of those that are in Hell, they cannot be drawn out, and of those that are in Hell, they cannot be drawn out.

U. S. E. 6. Let no Children think it any part of their misery or unhappiness, that by God's Providence they are under the government and discipline of those Parents who keep them in, and restrain them; who endeavour to nip the first buddings and blossoms of sin in them; who will not suffer them to run with others to that excess of riot which their corrupt

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corrupt Natures would be gratified with ; in a word, who use the best means they can for preventing of those evil Customs and Habits of Sin, which would be the misery of both Parents and Children. Let them think themselves well at ease under the Discipline of such Parents, and willingly submit their Necks to that Yoke which is laid upon them for their good. If they understand themselves, and their highest concernment, they will think themselves happier, a thousand times happier under that restraint, than if they had all that sinful liberty which man's corrupt Nature reacheth out after, and eagerly pursueth.

U S E 7.

Hence moreover we may learn, how great a benefit 'tis to live under Magistracy, where good Laws are duly executed, and Sin is severely punished. This through God's blessing is a means of the timely stopping of that course of Sin in many, which without this help would end in obstinacy and incorrigibleness. The wholesome severity of good Laws put in execution, prevents the growth of Sin, and the ripening of it into those habits, which making the Sinner's condition incurable, ripens him for his ruin. 'Tis no privilege, but a great misery, to live in a place where every man may do what is good in his own eyes, and where there is no Magistrate to put any man to shame. This

The Third Sermon.

Judges
18. 7.

was the condition of *Laish* before its destruction.

U S E 8.

V. 11.

This shews how much thankfulness is due unto God for those unto whom God hath been pleased to give converting grace after a long course of sin, by which they were so wofully hardened, as nothing would work upon them. When God converts old and obdurate Sinners, when he cures these Spiritual Diseases that seemed now to be past all cure, how doth he hereby magnify the power of his Grace, and how doth he exalt the riches of his Mercy! When God converts a young Sinner, he quickeneth the dead; but when he converts old Sinners, he quickeneth those who are as it were twice dead, as *St. Jude* speaks; dead by nature, and dead by long custom in sin, which had made them twofold more the Children of Hell, than they were by nature. If converting Grace, where-ever God is mercifully pleased to vouchsafe it, calls for thankfulness; surely when 'tis vouchsafed to old Sinners, it calls for double thankfulness. And so I have done with the uses of this Point. It remains that I answer one Objection, and so conclude.

Obj. If custom in sin, make it so extreamly difficult to leave sin; if to endeavour to reclaim such a one, be as it were to attempt
to

to wash a Blackmore white, this may seem to be a great discouragement to any man's endeavours for reforming old Sinners.

Ans. 'Tis certainly a great discouragement, and one of the greatest that is ; but yet should it not take a man off from seeking the Conversion even of such. For,

1. 'Tis a Duty ; and so the difficulty and doubtfulness of success doth not discharge a man from it.

2. Though it be extreamly difficult, yet 'tis not impossible. Old Sinners have sometimes obtained mercy, and God hath nowhere declared his purpose of denying converting Grace to such, absolutely and universally.

3. The more inveterate the habits of sin by long custom contracted, are grown, the sadder is the Condition of such, and the louder doth it call upon us to lend them our best help for rescuing them out of the Snare of the Devil.

4. Whatsoever the issue of our Endeavour may be, God will be thereby glorified, and *we shall be unto God a sweet savour of Christ in them that are saved, and in them that perish.* 2 Cor. 2. 15.

5. Though our Endeavours should prove successless, yet shall they be nevertheless accepted of God, and rewarded : *I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain ; yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work is with my God.* Isa. 49. 4.

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to be a great encouragement to any man's
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Conversion even of such. For

1. 'Tis a Duty; and so the difficulty and
obtuseness of sinners doth not discharge a

man from what is his duty. For though it be
difficult, yet it is necessary. Old sinners have some

times obtained mercy, and God hath so
where declared his purpose of saving con-
vert. Grace to such, absolutely and uni-

versally. The more inveterate the habits of sin
by long custom contracted are, the more the

power is the condition of life, and the
harder doth it call upon us to and then our
best help for releasing them out of the snare

of the Devil. Whatsoever the issue of our Endeavour
may be, God will be thereby glorified, and

we shall be into God a just reward of Cor. 2.
these that are saved, and in them that are lost.

2. Though our Endeavours should prove
ineffectual, yet shall they be not unprofitable ac-

cepted of God, and rewarded: I have laboured in Cor. 4.
in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing,
and in vain; yet surely my judgment is with the
Lord, and my wage is with my God.

The

F 4

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EPHES. V. 15, 16.

*See then that ye walk circum-
spectly; not as fools, but as wise, re-
deeming the time because the days
are evil.*

THESE Words, though containing in themselves an intire sense, have some coherence with what went before, as the Particle *ἔν*, *then* (as we render it) or *therefore*, implies. *Βλέπετε ἔν*, *See then that ye walk circumspectly*. Which Particle seems to look back upon what the Apostle had said, v. 8. touching their translation from darkness to light; from the darkness of *Gentilism*, to the light of the Gospel. *Ye were sometimes darkness*, saith he, *but now are ye light in the Lord*. Whence he presently infers in the same Verse, *walk as children of the light*. And again, v. 11. *Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness; but rather reprove them*. Seeing they were enlightned, he exhorts them to a conversation suitable to their present

present state. And this yet once more he presseth them unto in the words of my Text; *See then that ye walk circumspectly*: that is, Being now no longer in darkness, but in the light, *Take heed* that you indulge not your selves in those sins, and in that sinful liberty which formerly you did, when as yet the light of the Gospel had not been afforded you. Then you led your lives as you pleased, following the dictates of your dark Understandings, and the corrupt inclinations of your sinful Natures; but now better things are expected from you. This seems to be the connexion of the words with the Apostle's former Discourse; but I shall not take any notice of what might be observed from the coherence, but keep my self to the words absolutely considered, without any reflection upon the dependence of them. In the words we have,

1. A great and weighty Duty strictly enjoined; *See that ye walk circumspectly*.

2. An Argument by which the Duty is enforced; an Argument at least implied in those words, *not as fools, but as wise*. As if he had said, *See that ye walk circumspectly*, because 'tis our wisdom so to walk, and our folly if we do not.

3. We have one special instance of our circumspect walking, or in which our circumspection should be shewed; *redeeming the time*. And,

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4. An Argument, or Reason, to enforce that also; *because the days are evil.*

Of all these in order.

The first thing to be spoken to, is, The Duty enjoined; *See that ye walk circumspectly.* So then, the point to be treated of, is, That 'tis our Duty to walk circumspectly.

In Discourfing of this point, I shall

1. Shew what 'tis to walk circumspectly.
2. I shall further confirm the point by other parallel Scriptures.
3. I shall give the Reasons of it.
4. I shall make some Application of it.

Concerning the first of these, what it is to walk circumspectly, I shall speak

1st, Negatively.

2^{dly}, Affirmatively.

I shall first shew what it is not, and then what it is. Negatively then,

1. The circumspect walking here enjoined, doth not lie in an affected singularity; as when a man walks contrary to other men, with no other design, nor to no other end, than that he may not be like them, but be a person alone, and one by himself. God never calls us to this separation from the World;

1 Cor. 9.

10, 21, 22.

Rom. 12 2.

Rom. 12.

9.

1 Theff.

5. 22.

World: Neither hath this been the practice of holy men, whose Example is in Scripture set before us for our imitation. S. Paul professeth his condescension to men, and compliance with them in all lawful things, that he might win them to Christ. *Unto the Jews I became as a Jew, saith he, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak; I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.* How far was he from studying to be unlike to other men, who thus studied to apply himself to all men, and conform himself to them, so far as without sin he might do it! Yet here, let no man abuse this Example of the Apostle, and plead it for justifying his conforming himself to the sinful practice of every Company he lights on. The Apostle never gave any man such Example. This had been contrary to his own Doctrine, who chargeth us *not to conform ourselves to this world*; that is, to this wicked and sinful World, so far as such; And to *abhor that which is evil*; Yea, to *abstain from all appearance of evil*. But however, to go as far away from other men as we can, and to study to be opposite to them in those things in which we may lawfully conform to them, and especially where we may hope to do any good by our innocent compliance with them, is a singularity which God neither requireth of us, nor approves of. The root of

of this affected singularity, as we have reason to fear, is Pride. 'Tis a man's self-conceit, and good opinion of his own wisdom, that makes him chuse a way different from other men. And as the root, so the fruit of it is pride: For being now in this singular way which his self-conceit hath put him into, he pleaseth himself therein, and values himself accordingly, making account that he is so much better than other men, by how much his practice is different from them.

2. Circumspect walking doth not lie in a superstitious singularity, whereby a man placeth Duty and Religion in those things in which God hath placed none. This was the Sin of the old *Pharisees*, who taught for doctrines the commandments of men; that is, for Divine Doctrines, for the Precepts and Injunctions of God. And this is the sin of the Modern *Pharisees*, those of the Church of

Rome; who tread in their steps: And such, I fear, is the singularity of those among ourselves, whom we call *Quakers*. Though these Pharisaical Singularities may gain men a great reputation for Religion and Sanctity among men of their own Party, as do the different Habits, Diet, course of Life, usages and practices of the several Religious Orders in the Church of Rome; yet can they never commend them to God. Of all these superstitious Singularities by which they would separate and distinguish themselves from the Secular and Irreligious World, in which they pride themselves as matters highly acceptable and

Rev. 11.

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Mat. 15.9.

Rev. 22.
18.

and meritorious in the sight of God, and for which others of their own way admire, and even adore them; I say of all these things God saith, *Who hath required them at your hands?* That's all the thanks they must expect of him for them. Neither is this all; he looks upon their placing Religion and Sanctity in those things in which he hath placed none, as a bold and saucy entrenchment upon his own Authority and Prerogative. And indeed, what is it better, when men shall take upon them to be Legislators in God's room, making those things to be Sins and Duties which he never made so? Most severe is the threatening against such as add to the Word of God, which in effect these Men do; *God will add unto them the plagues that are written therein.*

3. Circumspect walking doth not consist in a scrupulous singularity. I distinguish this from the former; that is the singularity of bold and presumptuous Persons; this of weak, and not sufficiently informed tender Consciences, that call for our Pity and Compassions, rather than our Indignation, forasmuch as they would be glad to be better informed, and differ from the lawful practice of other Men conscientiously, and to no other end than that they might not offend God, as they groundlessly and erroneously apprehend they might. Though no Man's Error commends him unto God, yet his Carriage under an Error may; and this is the case of these Persons. And it was the very case of those Conscientious

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scientious, though mistaken, Jewish Believers at Rome, who not out of perverseness or turbulent opposition, but out of pure dissatisfaction in point of Conscience, did still observe those days, the observation whereof God then no longer required; and still forbear to eat those Meats which God then permitted to be eaten. Of those weak and mistaken Believers the Apostle saith, *He that regardeth a day, regardeth it to the Lord; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not.* His meaning is, That doing what they did out of Conscience, though misinformed, they (as their present condition was) did well, and so far had acceptance with God. But still I say, though there may be something that is good in a Man's not adventuring to go against the dictates of an Erroneous Conscience, namely, a fear of offending God if he should do otherwise than he doth, yet the circumstance walking here enjoined consists not in such a singularity; which being grounded on a mistake, a Man is bound to endeavour to be rid of it, and to be delivered from it as soon as he can. And the rather, because as the Circumstances may be in which a Man is, it may be most dangerous and pernicious to lie under his mistake, and continue in his Error but one day or hour. For the Error may be such as may put him upon desperate Attempts, or horrid Sins. Our Saviour saith, there would be those who would think they did God service by killing his Servants. A Man's Error may be such as may not only

Rom. 14.6.

John 16.2.

deprive

deprive him of some of those Liberties which he might lawfully take, but they may engage him in a constant neglect of his Duty, or opposition to that lawful Authority which God hath set over him. In these and the like cases a Man's mistake or misinformation will not excuse him before God, when he shall call him to an account.

Rom. 12. 1.

a 2 Kings

20. 3.

b Isa. 33.

15, 16.

c 2 Thes.

3. 6.

Mat. 2. 8.

And so much may suffice to have been spoken of circumspect walking Negatively. It now follows that I speak of it Affirmatively. To walk circumspectly, is a large and comprehensive thing. Walking takes in the whole course of a Man's Life, our whole carriage and deportment both with relation to God and Man. *I beseech thee, O Lord, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart. He that walketh righteously shall dwell on high, his place of defence shall be the munition of rocks. Withdraw your silver from every brother that walketh disorderly; that is, from every Professor of the Christian Religion that is of an irregular and disorderly Conversation. And on the contrary, to walk circumspectly, is to order our Conversation, and regulate our Lives with the greatest care, solicitude, and heedfulness. The word *circumspect* here used, may be rendred, accurately or exactly; and so to walk requires great heed and diligence. So the same word is taken for *circumspect*, *search diligently after the young Child*, said *Herod to the Wise Men*; and so in the Verse before,*

before, *in the* he diligently or exactly enquired the time when the Star appeared. Briefly therefore, to walk circumspectly is to use our utmost care and diligence to please God in all things, and to yield obedience to all his Commandments; to perform every known Duty, and to avoid every known sin; 'tis, with the Apostle, *Herein to exercise* Act. 24. 16.
our selves to have always a Conscience void of offence toward God and toward men. 'Tis to make this our daily work, and the great and constant business of our Lives.

From what hath been said, 'tis manifest that circumspect walking implies,

1. An heeding and observing all our ways with relation to the Rule; and,

2. A careful endeavour in all things to conform our selves to the Rule; so that he, and he only walks circumspectly, who hath the Rule always before him, ponders and considers all his paths with relation to it, and orders all his steps accordingly, at least who sincerely endeavours so to do.

Now in the second place, That 'tis our Duty to walk circumspectly, may be confirmed from divers other Scriptures enjoining it, though not in the same terms, yet in other words and expressions to the same effect. When God had given the *Israelites* the Ten Commandments, and many other particular Laws, he addeth this strict charge for the

- Ex. 13. 13. due observance of them. *In all things that I have said unto you, be circumspect*; which charge though it did in a special manner concern that people, yet it reacheth us also in reference to whatever God hath enjoined us, there being every way as much reason that we should be circumspect, and in some respects more, we having greater light, and clearer revelations of the Will of God under the Gospel than they had under the Law; as also greater Encouragements to obedience by the more full discoveries of the Rewards of obedience in the other World. So again,
- Josh. 22. 5. *Take diligent heed to do the commandments and*
 Josh. 23. *the law. Take good heed unto your selves that ye*
 11. *love the Lord your God*; which love was to be shewed by cleaving to him, and obeying him, as there afterwards it follows. *Where-*
 Pl. 119. 9. *with shall a young man cleanse his way? by ta-*
 Prov. 4. *king heed thereto according to thy word. Let*
 25, 26, 27. *thine eyes look right on, let thine eyelids look straight*
before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let
all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right
hand, nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil.
 By all which variety of expressions we are required to be wary and circumspect in all our ways, that we may not in any thing
 Mat. 24. *twerve from the Rule. And this is that*
 42. *which in the New Testament is so often en-*
 Mat. 25. *joined under the Metaphorical expressions of*
 13. *warching, and watchfulness.*
 1 Cor. 16. *And so I come to the third thing pro-*
 13. *pounded, which was to give the reasons why*
 1 Thel. *we*
 5 6.
 Rev. 3. 2.

we are to walk circumspectly ; and they are many.

1. In regard of God's Presence and Eye.

He compasseth our path, and our lying down, and is acquainted with all our ways. His eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good. He accurately and narrowly observes us : He marketh all our paths. He considereth and thoroughly weigheth all our actions, and every step we take ; He pondereth all our going. And not only our ways and outward actions, but our hearts and the secret frame of them ; He pondereth the hearts, and he weigheth the spirits. Add hereunto the infinite holiness of that God who thus observes us, and whose Eye is continually upon us ; *He is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity.* Now what heedfulness and circumspection can be too much in all our actions, where there is such an observer and witness of every thing we do ?

Ps. 139. 3.
Prov. 15. 3.

Job 33. 11.
Prov. 5. 21.

Prov. 21. 2.
Prov. 16. 2.

Hab. 1. 13.

2. We must walk circumspectly in regard

of Satan the Enemy of Souls, who is ever lying in wait for us to entrap us, and as a *raring Lion is still walking about seeking whom he may devour.* He hath his wiles and devices to over-reach us. He hath his grins and snares hid in all places to catch us. Now if a Man had a malicious Enemy always following him, ever eying and observing him, and ready to catch at any thing to be made use of for his ruin, he would think it highly concerned him to be circumspect, and that

1 Pet. 5. 8.
2 Cor. 2. 11.
2 Tim. 3. 7.

he could not be too wary to prevent and cut off all advantages against himself.

3. It concerns us to be circumspect in regard of the World that observes our actions, and is ready to make the worst construction of them; such is the injustice and malignity of this evil World, that many times your best actions shall be most harshly censured; how much more those passages of your Life that are of a doubtful nature, and may be well or ill interpreted, as Men stand affected towards you? Upon this account it is, that the Apostle exhorts us to *walk in wisdom towards them that are without*; and our Saviour cautions us to be *wise as serpents, but harmless as doves*.

Col. 4. 5.

Mat. 10.

16.

4. It concerns us to be circumspect in respect of our selves, and the corruption of our Nature, in respect of the great danger we are in from within, though we had no Enemy without us. Our hearts are false and treacherous, strongly inclined to evil, and ready to comply with all Temptations: *The heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked*. Having such a dangerous Inmate within our own Bosoms; it stands upon us to walk circumspectly, and to think our selves no longer safe than we keep a strict guard over our selves, and carefully heed all our goings, that we may never tread beside that narrow path which we are required to walk in.

Jer. 17. 9.

5. It concerns us to walk circumspectly in regard of the strict account we must hereafter

give

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give of all our ways. God will bring every work to judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. ^a We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. ^b Of every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof at the day of judgment. When they shall be accountable to God for their Omissions as well as for their Commissions. They who verily believe they must be called to so strict an account, how can they think they can ever walk strictly and circumspectly enough? Believing and expecting this great day of reckoning, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness? As the Apostle speaks.

6. It behoves us to walk circumspectly in regard of the high and everlasting concernment of our ways, and walking while we are here. *Ab hoc momento pendet eternitas.* As we demean our selves, so we must fare hereafter for ever; As a Man soweth here, so shall he reap hereafter. He that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; and he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting. A short time is here allotted us to be improved for our everlasting happiness in another World. If this time be neglected, it will not be long ere the things belonging to our peace will be hid from our Eyes. There will thenceforth be no more offers of Mercies, no more opportunities of

Eccles. 12.

14.

^a 2 Cor.

5. 10.

^b Mat. 12.

36.

Mat. 25.

41, 42, 43.

² Pet. 3. 11

Gal. 6. 7, 8.

making our peace with God. There will be no more place to Eternity for redeeming time, and correcting the Errors and Miscalriages of our heedless and uncircumspect walking. O then how great should our care, how exact should our circumspection be, while the day of grace lasteth, and while opportunity is afforded us of laying up a good Foundation for the time to come, that we may lay hold of Eternal Life!

I come now to the Uses of this point. Is it the Duty of every Christian to walk circumspectly?

U S E I.

Then let no Man take offence at the strictness and circumspection of any who endeavour to conform themselves to the Rule as exactly as they can; Let no Man judge so much Care and Circumspection to be needless. Can any Man be too careful where the injunctions of care, heedfulness, circumspection, and watchfulness, are so many, so peremptory, and absolute, and where our Concernment is so high and important, and that upon so many accounts? If any cannot bring their own Hearts to be willing to live by the Rule, and to conform to it, yet let them not condemn or censure others; especially seeing the Holy Ghost hath noted it as a chief point of true Wisdom thus to walk, and branded the neglect thereof with folly,

as we shall see afterwards. But if any will yet be wise in their own Eyes, and reproach the wisdom of God as foolishness, let them hear what God saith concerning such; *They Jer. 8. 9. have rejected the word of the Lord, and what wisdom is in them?* Whatever for the present they may judge of the fineness of such as endeavour to keep in the narrow way that leadeth to Life, the time is coming when they will be of another mind. When they come to stand before the Tribunal of Christ to be accountable not only for all the more notorious Irregularities and Extravagancies of their Life, but for every idle word; O then they will acknowledge that the circumspection and watchfulness which they now deride and laugh at, and look upon as folly, would have stood them in some stead. Then they will be convinced that the most circumspect Man is the wisest Man. Then they will say of the sincerely pious and strictly conscientious person whom they now condemn, as the Author of the *Book of Wisdom* brings them in speaking; *They shall change their minds, saith he, and seek for grief of mind, and say within themselves, This is he whom we sometime had in derision, and in a parable of reproach. We fools thought his life madness, and his end without honour. How is he counted among the children of God, and his portion is among the saints!*

Wild. 5.
3. 4. 5.

U S E 2.

Is it the Duty of every Christian to walk circumspectly? Then how much do they fail and come short of their Duty who walk at all adventures, and live by no Rule! Who regard not at all how they walk, or where they tread! This is that despising of our ways, which *Salomon* makes to be so dangerous and destructive. *He that despiseth his ways shall die*; that is, he that is of so loose, careless, and heedless a temper, that he rambles up and down like a drunken man, or a mad-man, without any consideration or regard of his way; that minds not, considers not his way, whether it be safe or dangerous, but on he posts with full speed, through Dirt and Stones, over Bogs and Quagmires, upon Pits and Precipices, all is alike to him: He that thus lives hand over head, takes the ready course to destroy his own Soul. This is noted concerning *Jehu*, a man of a rash and precipitant Spirit, that he took no heed to walk in the Law of the Lord God of *Israel* with all his heart. And this is a part of the Character of the ungodly man, that he casts God's Words behind him, where it might be sure to be out of his Eye, as not caring to look upon it, or regard it, for the regulating of his Life, and the due ordering of his Conversation thereby. Whithersoever the impetuous violence of such mens corrupt nature hurries them, thither speed they without

Prov. 19.
26.2 Kings
10. 31.

Ps. 50. 17.

without any regard either of their Duty, or of the issues of their sinful courses. *They consider not that they do evil, saith Solomon, but rush into sin as the horse rusheth into the battle.* Eccl. 5. 1. Though God be in a readiness to meet them in their ways of sin, and to withstand them as an armed man, yet they go on daringly and presumptuously; even running upon the thick bosses of his buckler, as the fool-hardiness of such rash and bold Sinners is described, *Job 15. 26.* Jer. 8. 6.

U. S. E. 3.

Let us all be persuaded to walk more circumspectly; to keep a more narrow and constant watch over our selves, and to take better heed to our ways than we have done. Now though all are concerned, highly concerned to walk circumspectly, yet are some in a special manner concerned to do it above others. As,

1. They who in respect of their Rank and Quality, their Acquaintance and Alliances, their Callings and Employments, are exposed to most Temptations. They who necessarily meet with many Temptations, cannot but often offend, unless they be very circumspect.

2. It concerns them above others to be circumspect who have formerly most offended through their carelessness, their heedlessness, and their want of more circumspection.

How

How often have you been overtaken with sin in one kind or other, which you might easily have avoided, if you had been circumspect? 'Tis high time for you to resolve to be more circumspect for the future, who have already contracted so much guilt through your carelessness, and especially if you have also smarted for your careless and regardless walking.

3. It concerns them above others to be circumspect, who in respect of their Places and Stations ought to be Examples to others. These are so much the more obliged to walk circumspectly, because else they become ill patterns to those whose Eyes are upon them, and occasions of much sin and guilt to them.

4. It behoves them above others to walk circumspectly, who are drawing near the end of their walk; who are not far from their long home, and have little time left them to correct the manifold Errors of their Life past.

5. It behoves them above others to walk circumspectly, who after more strictness formerly have for some time now last past taken more liberty, and walked more loosely and carelessly. For,

(1.) If these give not all diligence to recover themselves, and regain what they have lost, they will still grow more remiss and careless.

(2.) It

2. It would be a very sad thing if their last ways should be their worst, and if death should surprize them in a declining condition.

6. It behoves them above others to walk circumspectly, who having been often convinced of the necessity and comforts of circumspect walking, and having often resolved on it, could never yet put their Resolutions in practice, or at least with any constancy go on therein. The Convictions and Resolutions of these Persons, as they do much aggravate and heighten their sin, so they will much heighten and inflame their reckoning when God shall call them to an account.

Now in the further prosecution of this Use, I shall offer some Directions for walking circumspectly; give some Cautions about it; and lastly, answer such Objections as may be made against it. By way of Direction for walking circumspectly, I shall only mention these few things:

1. Keep your heart with all diligence. As the frame of your heart is, so for the most part are your actions: *From the heart are the issues of life.* Your circumspection in the course of your Life hath its rise from your keeping your heart. He that neglects his heart will never be able to order and frame his words and actions according to the rule. Wherefore be sure that you lay the Foundation

Prov. 4. 23.
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tion of all your circumspection, in the heeding of your heart, and in keeping it under Government. Govern your heart well, and you govern your Tongue, and rule your hand, and the whole Man. Let the heart be once out of order, and the effects of it will soon appear in the unruliness of the Tongue, and the irregularity of your Actions. Whatsoever else is out of order, to be sure the heart was first out of order. O how easy a task would it be to order all the rest, if the heart were well ordered! O let's begin there, keeping a strict and constant guard over it.

2. Set God always before your Eyes, and labour to keep up lively Apprehensions of his Presence and Omniscience. How awful and circumspect would this make you! How solicitous would you be of pleasing him, and how much afraid of offending him! This constant sense of God's presence, and awe of his All-seeing Eye upon our hearts, no man that hath not had some Experience of it, can easily conceive what an influence it would have upon us to beget in us this holy circumspection. 'Tis our unmindfulness of God's Eye and Presence that makes us so heedless and unwatchful.

3. Consider all your ways, and ponder your paths, as Solomon's counsel is, *Weight your words and actions in the balance of the sanctuary, examine them by the rule.* But let this be done most carefully and exactly when any matter of great and weighty consequence lies before you. Then be sure that you do nothing

nothing but upon sound and mature deliberation; and upon clear satisfaction, that what you do, is agreeable to the rule, and suitable to the principles of good conscience. How often doth mens precipitancy and rashness hurry them into those sins, which afterwards occasion much anguish and horror of Conscience to them. So what is rashly done in a quarter of an hour, lies grating upon their Consciences many years after; it may be they are never fully eased of the burthen of it as long as they live.

4. Take heed of being swayed and overruled by the judgment and practice of others, to a compliance with them in what your own Conscience is not satisfied to do. The Opinion and Practice of the multitude is a deceitful and crooked Rule. What the generality cry up, approve of, and applaud, concur and agree in, may be extremely evil; what is highly esteemed among men, may be abomination in the sight of God. And again, What men cry down, and vilify, what they make to be matter of reproach and contumely; that may be in such account with God, as it may be highly accepted and rewarded. And yet so it is, that we are apt to place very much in the opinion and example of a multitude. What many or most do, what the generality of Town and Country do, that we stick not to do. Weak Arguments shall be strong enough to prevail with us to be of the stronger side, and to concur with the multitude. Wherefore it

Luk. 16.
15.

Ex. 23. 2.

was not without great cause that God gave his People a special caution against this weak and sinful compliance. *Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil, neither shalt thou speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest judgment.* God saw our proneness to be influenced and swayed by the multitude, and to go, *non quæ eundem, sed quæ iter*, not in that path in which we should go, but in which the greater part go. If in any thing therefore our circumspection be necessary, it is when we are assaulted with the temptation to warp and turn aside out of the right way.

5. Be careful to keep at a distance from all temptations to sin, as far as you are able. Where you foresee they are making towards you, avoid them, run away from them. Herein lies a great part of your circumspection. If you heedlessly and carelessly run upon temptations, and much more if you wilfully and presumptuously cast your self upon them, 'tis no hard matter to foretell what the issue will be. No man can expect to be strengthened against temptations, and to be secured against the malignant influences of them, that is not careful to avoid them as far as he is able; and much less may he expect it, that wittingly and deliberately ventures on them. This man doth indeed highly provoke God to leave him to the power of temptation, that he may smite for his presumptuous folly in the end. He, and he only walks safely, that walks so circumspectly as not to come too near the borders of sin and temptation.

6. Above

6. Above all, take heed of sinful intanglements. By sinful intanglements, I mean any rash Ties or Engagements to do what may not be done with a good conscience. When any man is by Oath, or Promise, or any other way under an Engagement to do what is sinful, he is in the Snare of the Devil, out of which 'twill be very difficult to disentangle himself. That were a fearful case; and therefore he that loves his own Soul, and consults his innocency, and the peace of his Conscience, will be so circumspect as to beware of such intanglements.

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The

The Fifth Sermon.

EPHES. V. 15, 16.

See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time because the days are evil.

HAVING done with the Directions for walking circumspectly; I now come in the next place to the Cautions relating thereunto; and they are these.

1. Let not your circumspection and conscientiousness degenerate into vain scrupulosity, and needless singularity: Neither make more sins, nor more duties, than the Law of God hath made. That a Person of a tender Conscience may offend this way, both Experience shews, and the Caveat of Solomon against it; *Be not righteous overmuch.* 'Tis certain that no man can be too strict or conscientious, too exact or punctual in performance of what is really matter of duty: The Wiseman's meaning therefore is, Be

Ec. 7. 16.

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not over-scrupulous, placing sin or duty in those things in which they are not. This groundless scrupulousness is attended with several mischiefs.

1. It often exposeth men to dangers causelessly, and brings those evils upon them, which if they were better informed, they might without sin avoid.

2. It straitens them, and ties them up more than need is, and deprives them of those lawful Liberties which they might with a good Conscience make use of, and enjoy.

3. It makes them apt to judge and censure those causelessly and uncharitably, who lawfully, and with a good conscience, do those things, which they through misinformation judge ought not to be done.

4. If circumspection should degenerate into vain and needless scrupulousness, it would bring a reproach upon truly conscientious strictness, and that holy circumspection which God requires of us. Upon these Considerations, let not, I say, your circumspection degenerate into vain and needless scrupulosity, which is the first Caution.

2. In your circumspect walking, be sure that you ever lay the greatest stress upon the greatest matters. Take care that you be not like the Scribes and Pharisees, who would strain at a gnat, but swallow a camel. Make Conscience of all known Duties, even of the least, of tithing mint and cummin; but let your chief

chief care, and most solicitous circumspection be exercised about the *weightier matters of the law*. For if while you would seem to be very circumspect about smaller matters, and to make much conscience of little things, you make no conscience at all of far greater matters; You hereby

1. Make evident proof of your Hypocrisy unto all that observe your Conversation.

2. You throw dirt upon circumspect walking, and cause the strict and holy ways of God to be misjudged, and evil-spoken of.

So much concerning the 2^d Caution.

3. Notwithstanding your own personal strictness and circumspection, be not forward to condemn others, who in some things may be satisfied to do what you cannot. I say, be not forward to condemn their Persons, much less their Estate; provided that

1. They be such as otherwise walk unblameably as to the general course of their lives.

2. Provided also, that the things in which you are not satisfied to do as they do, be not clearly and undeniably against the Rule. I say, these things provided, be not forward to condemn them in respect of those things in which their practice is different from your own.

4. When you have done all that you can, and framed your life with the greatest circumspection and exactness that you can possibly attain unto, look for your acceptance with God, through Christ only, *and count all things, your best things, loss and dung in comparison of Christ.*

So from the Cautions, I pass on to the Objections that may be made against circumspect walking. Men generally are so much for liberty, that this circumspect walking is not very acceptable to them. Many things they have to say against it: and indeed it were strange, if a course of life so contrary to our corrupt Inclinations, should not be encountred with many Objections. I shall endeavour to say something to the chief of them, that so the Prejudices that fright men away from circumspect walking, or possess their minds with misprisions or mistakes concerning it, being removed, men may be reconciled to it, or at least be persuaded to make trial of it. If they would make trial of it, their own experience would quickly undeceive them, and induce them to entertain a better opinion of it. The Objections which I shall speak to, are these that follow:

Object. 1. Such a strict course of life, so severe and circumspect a conversation, would deprive men of all the comforts of this life, and plunge them in the depths of sadness and melancholly. God in all his dealings and Providences designs our good and comfort;

fort; who then can imagine that he should call us unto, and ingage us in so mopish and monkish a way?

Ans. 'Tis a great mistake, and a very groundless prejudice against the ways of God, to conceive them to be so dark and uncomfortable, because there is such circumspection required of those that will walk in them.

It must be here granted, that they do indeed call us off from carnal pleasures, and from those sinful delights, concerning which

Solomon saith, that they are madness; and a kind of mirth, the end whereof is heaviness. Eccl. 2. 2.
Prov. 14.

But is it to be accounted so great a misery to be taken off, and disingaged from these deceitful Pleasures, from these dangerous and pernicious baits of sin? Is it so desirable a

thing to go to Hell laughing; to be permitted to run on jollity and merrily to the Pit of Eternal Destruction, as the silly Bird,

that being overjoyed at the sight of the alluring and killing Bait, gladly hasteneth to the Snare? Is there so much happiness in being at liberty, to be joyfully speeding down to the Chambers of death, as the fool runs on

singing and dancing to the correction of the flocks? If God be pleased to take us off from running on heedlessly and securely upon these dangerous Precipices, should we not look upon it as our happiness? Hath he reason to

think himself hardly dealt with, or injured by me, from whose lips I snatch away a cup

of sweet and delicious Poyson, which he is endeavouring to swallow down as greedily, as if it were a Cordial?

2. Yet is not this all. God calls us off from these killing Pleasures, that we may exchange them for better; for safe, sound, and substantial Pleasures, true Delights, satisfying Contentments, durable and lasting Joys. Such are to be found in the ways of God; and the more any man denies himself, as to all sinful Delights; the more strictly, heedfully, and circumspectly he walks, the more of these spiritual Comforts and Refreshings may he hope to enjoy.

Obj. 2. Many of those who seem to walk circumspectly, and to be of a very strict and severe conversation, seem to lead but heavy and uncomfortable lives. For who are more full of sad Complains, and inward Troubles? Who are more subject to doubtings and dissatisfactions about their spiritual Estate? Who are more held under bondage through the fears of their Eternal miscarrying, than many of these?

Ans. Though all this be true, yet is this no prejudice, no just prejudice to circumspect walking.

For *1st* The cause hereof is mostly in themselves, and not in the ways of God; neither is it in the least to be attributed to their circumspect walking, but rather to their

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not walking more circumspectly. Their own carelessness, and want of due heed and circumspection in their ways; their venturing on sin, or inconstancy or slothfulness in holy Duties, or some other miscarriage, is often the true cause of all their troubles. Were they more circumspect, they would be freer from troubles.

2. Sometimes their troubles arise from their darkness, and misapprehensions of the Covenant of Grace, and the Terms on which God offers mercy unto Sinners.

3. Sometimes their troubles arise from their unbelief, and from their refusing to be comforted, and their putting off, and thrusting away from themselves those Comforts which God reacheth forth unto them.

4. Sometimes their troubles are much from the temptations of *Satan*; God for divers wise and gracious Ends permitting them to be so exercised. But however it be, and from what cause soever their troubles proceed, while they are in God's ways, they are in the ways of peace, and all shall at length end in peace.

5. In the mean time, their condition at present, with all its disadvantages, is a thousand times better than the condition of those who spend their days in sinful Frolicks, and even glut themselves with carnal Pleasures, and sensual Delights, and suddenly go down to Hell, and there meet with so much the more torment and sorrow, by how much they lived more voluptuously and deliciously

here. O thrice miserable is their condition, who go from their heaven of sensual Delights and Satisfaction here, to an eternity of Misery and Torment in the other World! And thrice happy they, who having made choice of the narrow way that leadeth unto life, through many inward troubles and fears, and much outward tribulation also, if need be, enter at last into the Kingdom of God; That blessed and glorious Kingdom, where all tears are wiped from their eyes, where sorrow and sighing shall flee away, and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads. And so much in Answer to that Objection.

Obj. 3. The God whom we serve is a God of mercy; *He delighteth in mercy; And his tender mercies are over all his works.* There is no Attribute of God which the Holy Scriptures do more exalt and magnify, than his Mercy. His Mercies being so great, why may we not hope to find mercy with him, although we take some liberty, and be not so strict and circumspect? Can we apprehend that a God of so great mercy, will be so severe as to condemn us, cast us into Hell, and expose us to everlasting Torments for want of this circumspection?

Ans. Though the Mercies of God be exceeding great, yet saving-mercy is not extended to all, but reserved for those that fear him; for such as keep his covenant, and remember his commandments to do them. 'Tis for the truly

Mich. 7.
18.

Pl. 145. 9.

Psal. 103.
17, 18.

truly humbled, penitent, and reformed Sinner. He that confesseth his sin, and forsaketh it, shall have mercy. God shews mercy to them that love him, and keep his commandments. But as for such as plead God's mercy, to justify themselves in their careless and loose conversation, these must expect no mercy from him. God never promised saving mercy to any that are not so strict as to make conscience of the least sin, and so circumspect as to keep a watch over themselves, that they be not overtaken with sin. Without some measure of this circumspection, no man can satisfy himself touching the truth of his Repentance, without which there is no forgiveness, no mercy to be looked for at the hands of God. For true Repentance necessarily includes a sincere desire and serious endeavour to relinquish all sin: Now how can this serious and earnest endeavour to leave all sin, be without such an holy wariness and circumspection as that which hath been treated of? Can an uncircumspect and careless person, that heeds not what he doth, or how he walks, that takes liberty to please himself, that sticks not to run upon any temptations to sin that lie in his way; can this person be thought to be one that seriously and earnestly endeavours to forsake all sin? Nothing less; he that truly desires, and seriously endeavours to forsake Sin, will be circumspect and watchful; if he be not, 'tis apparent that he hath no great edge against his Sin; there is as yet no such deadly feud between

Prov. 28.
13.
Ex. 20. 6.

between him and his Sin, as is required in every true Penitent.

Obj. 4. Christ hath freed us from the Law; and Believers now under the Gospel are more at liberty than formerly they were. What necessity therefore is there of so much strictness and circumspection? How doth such a severe course of Life consist with the liberty that Christ hath purchased for us?

Ans. Christ hath indeed freed us from any Obligation to the Ceremonial Law, and from the Moral Law as a Covenant of Works that requires perfect and unerring obedience; we are not to be justified by the works of the Law, but by Faith in Christ. But however the Moral Law is still in force as the Rule of Life, and we are still under the commanding power thereof. And that we are so, is manifest several ways.

1. Christ himself expressly declares, that
Mat. 5. 17. he came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it. And the Apostle, even when he disputes against justification by the works of the Law, is so far from asserting that we are freed from the obligation of the Law, that he doth with much vehemency affirm
Rom. 3. 31. the contrary; Do we then make void the law through Faith? God forbid, saith he, yea we establish the law.

2. Our Saviour in his preaching every where presseth Obedience to the Moral Law, and urgeth the Duties thereof: And in particular his most Divine and Excellent Sermon
 on

on the Mount doth in great part consist of that subject.

3. In that Sermon he doth not only press the Duties of the Moral Law, but vindicate the Law it self in many particulars, and more strictly enforceth Obedience thereunto, and severely threatens the Disobedient.

4. He declares, that if our righteousness exceed not the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, (who yet went very far in many things) we shall never enter into the kingdom of God. Promising Mercy to no Sinners but such as take his yoke upon them; And letting all workers of Iniquity, and wilful Transgressors of the Law know, that he will never acknowledge them for his, but utterly disclaim them, and cast them off at the great day of their appearance before him, notwithstanding all their pleas and pretensions for being owned by him.

5. As Christ himself ever called for Obedience to the Moral Law, and urged the Duties thereof, so did the Apostles after him. St. Paul in his Discourse with Felix, reasoned of righteousness, and temperance, and judgment to come. And writing to the Corinthians, he saith, Know ye not, that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revellers, nor extortioners shall inherit the kingdom of God. All which being Sins against the Moral Law, exclude Men out of Heaven; so strictly

Mat. 5. 20.

Mat. 11. 29.

Mat. 7. 23.

Act. 24. 25.

1 Cor. 6. 9, 10.

Rom. 13.

1, 2.

Col. 3. 18.

19, &c.

Col. 4. 1.

. 11. 1116

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. 22 7 358

Joh. 3. 19.

Mat. 3. 10.

Luk. 3. 17.

2 Thes. 1.

7, 8.

strictly doth God still even now under the Gospel insist on and require Obedience to the Moral Law. And thus the Apostle presseth the Duty of Subjects to Magistrates, the Duty of Parents to Children, and of Children to Parents; as also the respective Duties of Husbands and Wives, Masters and Servants. He that peruseth these Scriptures, how can he think that the Moral Law is now out of date, and no longer in force to them that have embraced the Gospel, and by Faith received Christ?

6. The Gospel is so far from discharging the Professors thereof from Obedience to the Law, that it more strongly enforceth Obedience, and lays an higher Obligation thereunto upon Christians than was laid upon the Jews; in regard that greater Light, and more powerful Motives and Inducements to Obedience are now afforded. Hence those severe and terrible threatnings in case of Disobedience. *This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.* Now is the Ax laid to the root of the tree; therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewen down and cast into the fire. Christ comes with his fan in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable. The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty Angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the Gospel. And what doth

the grace of God revealed in this Gospel teach Tit. 2. 11,
us, but to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and 12.
to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present
world?

7. Did Christ ever intend by his death
to purchase for us a liberty of sinning?
Did he not therefore give himself for us, that
he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify
to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good
works? And lastly, on whom was the injun-
ction of walking circumspectly here in the
Text imposed? Was it not on Believers?

And this may suffice to have been spoken
to that Objection.

Obj. 5. If so much heedfulness and cir-
cumpection be required of Christians,
what will become of many that profess the
Christian Religion? We see no great num-
bers of them that are so strict and circum-
spect; shall they all perish, notwithstanding
all the Privileges which they enjoy in the
visible Church, who attain not to this cir-
cumpection?

A. Our Saviour hath plainly declared,
that many are called, but few are chosen. And
again, That wide is the gate, and broad is the
way that leadeth to destruction, and many there
be that go in thereat; and that strait is the gate,
and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and
few there be that find it. What can we say
against such plain, express, and absolute
passages

Mat. 20.

16.

Mat. 22.

14.

Mat 7. 13,

14.

passages of Scripture delivered by the Mouth of him that is Truth it self, and can neither deceive nor be deceived? A very weighty and dreadful Truth it is, that calls upon us all to give all diligence that we may be found in that small number, which we are never likely to be, unless we walk circumspectly. If to walk circumspectly be a Duty incumbent on all Christians, who is there amongst us all that may think himself exempted from it? Who can plead for himself that he hath a particular Dispensation to lead his Life in another manner, and to go to Heaven upon easier terms than others may?

But perhaps you will say, though we are all enjoined to walk circumspectly, and though it be a Duty incumbent on all, yet 'tis not enjoined as absolutely necessary to Salvation. We may hope God intends not to shut all out of Heaven that have not walked circumspectly. This were very hard.

A. I Answer briefly; If it be a Duty to walk circumspectly, then 'tis a Sin not to walk; and every Sin unrepented of, excludes a man out of Heaven. If any Man think this to be hard, he must know, that as hard as it is, God will never alter the terms on which Eternal Life is offered men, and frame more favourable and cheap terms to gratify mens corrupt Affections.

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Obj. 6. Many who never walked with so much circumspection, die peaceably. When they are going out of the World, we hear of no complaints, no discovery of fears, no trouble of Conscience. A man would not wish to leave the World with more peace and quiet than many of these do.

A. To die without dread and horror, or free from inward troubles and conflicts, is no certain and infallible Argument of a good Estate. Their Estate is never the better, or the more safe, because they die quietly. Their Consciences may be seared, and their Hearts may be so hardened as they may have no sense of their Spiritual condition. We find by Experience, that this is the case of many a wicked man that hath led a very lewd and ungodly life. Ask many such when they lie a dying, how 'tis with them, whether there be any thing that troubles them, or lies heavy upon their Consciences? And they will readily answer, There is nothing that troubles them, nothing that disturbs their peace. Ask them, if they be willing to die, and whether they be not afraid of death? Their answer is, they are very willing to die; and as for death, they fear it not. Now call you this a dying peaceably and comfortably, when men of very bad or careless Lives go out of the World fast asleep in carnal security? When they die without any sense of their Spiritual
and

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and Everlasting Estate? O be not deceived! 'tis certainly a very sad and fearful thing, when a careless or wicked Life, without any evidence of after-repentance, is shut up in a quiet and undisturbed death. How much better grounds of comfortable hopes concerning the Everlasting Estate of such men were there, if they died under many fears and troubles from a sound conviction and thorough sense of the sins of their Life! 'Tis very true, you will say, if they had been very wicked Men, great and notorious Sinners; But if the worst that can be said of them, is, that they have been careless and uncircumspect in their Lives, the matter is not much.

A. Considering the corruption of our Nature, our strong proneness to Evil, the many Temptations we meet with, and the malice and restlessness of Satan ever watching to take hold of all advantages against us to hurry us into Sin; 'tis impossible but that a man of a careless and uncircumspect Life, should have led a very sinful Life, and have contracted and heaped up a great deal of guilt; and therefore if such a one without discovery of any After-repentance and Humiliation, and without any trouble upon account of his Sins, go quietly out of the World, 'tis a sad and uncomfortable thing; and though we may not rashly and peremptorily pass our Judgment concerning the Eternal Estate of particular Persons, yet have we
just

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just cause to fear, and all things considered, we cannot but greatly fear how it may be with such a one in the other World. Sure we are, without Repentance, whereof there was no evidence or appearance, he must everlastingly miscarry.

So from the Duty of walking circumspectly, I come to the Argument by which it is enforced, implied in the next words, *Not as fools, but as wise.* 'Tis every man's wisdom to walk circumspectly, but his folly to be careless, uncircumspect and heedless in the course of his Life. *Wisdom is before him that hath understanding.* That is, He that hath understanding, the man that is truly wise, his wisdom is before him to look right on, to ponder the path of his feet, as *Solomon* speaks, to spy out and consider his way, to direct and govern his steps. And so is this Proverb expounded by that other to the same purpose, *The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way*; that's the use which he makes of his wisdom; he is, as to that matter, wise for himself, in *Solomon's* Language still; *But the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth*; he exerciseth that little reason which he hath, about remoter things, about any thing else rather than what most nearly concerns him, the observing and making choice of his way. As if a Man should fix his Eyes on the Hills at a great distance, where the Earth and the Heavens seem to meet, and in the mean time neglect to heed

Prov. 17.
24.

Prov. 4.
25, 26.

Prov. 14. 8.

Prov. 9. 12.

his way, to observe where he treads, and what dangers he runs upon; as the Philosopher who fell into a Pit whilst his Eyes were taken up with the Contemplation of the Celestial Bodies. Thus we see 'tis our wisdom to walk circumspectly; and 'tis so in several respects.

1. We hereby shun and avoid the greatest Evils.

Hab. i. 6. 1. The displeasure of God, whose wrath is so terrible, that it made the Prophet cry out, *Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger?*

Prov. 18. 14. 2. The sting of an evil and guilty Conscience, the Torment whereof is intolerable; *A wounded spirit who can bear?*

Mat. 16. 26. 3. The loss of a man's Soul, which nothing can compensate or make up. *What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* He that walketh circumspectly, avoideth these three great and formidable Evils, greater than which none can be; the displeasure of God, the sting of a guilty Conscience, and the loss of his Soul.

2. On the contrary, by walking circumspectly, we secure to our selves the greatest, the most desirable good things.

2 Chron. 15. 2. 1. The favour of God; for while we are with God in a course of Obedience, he is with

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with us. 'Tis only sin that deprives us of God's favour. Now the *favour of God is better than life.* What is there in all the World that is comparable to it? Psal. 63.3.

2. It secures to us peace of Conscience. *As many as walk according to this rule, peace be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.* And this also is a thing of invaluable worth. *A good conscience is a continual feast.* The comfort of which is so great, as none can tell what it is, but he that hath had experience of it in himself. *It passeth knowledge.* Gal. 6.16.
Prov. 14.13.
Eph. 4.7.

3. By walking Circumspectly, we secure to our selves the Everlasting well-being of our Souls, which even in Satan's valuation of them are more worth than the whole World. *To him that ordereth his conversation aright, will I shew the salvation of God.* Mat. 4.9.
Psa. 50.23.

There being these singular advantages of walking circumspectly, you need not be much troubled at the Censures of the World. They who are strangers to the ways of God, and were never acquainted with the Comforts of them, may count them little better than Fools that run not with them to the same excess of Riot: But this is more than enough to satisfy and quiet you, that what they count foolishness, the Holy Ghost honours with the Elogy of Wisdom.

So I have done with the great Duty of circumspect walking, together with the reason by which it is enforced. I come now to speak of the particular instance in which our circumspection should be exercised, *Redem-*

ing the time. To redeem, properly, is by laying down a price to purchase again, or recover that which another hath gotten possession of: So a Captive or a Slave is redeemed out of the hand of an Enemy: So a Man redeems his Goods which have been pawned or sold to another. Now in this very sence to redeem time that is gone is impossible: For time is of that nature, that it can never be recovered when once 'tis lost. All the Gold and Silver, all the Pearls and Richest Treasures in the World, were not a price sufficient to purchase again, and recover one quarter of an hour when 'tis past: Wherefore by redeeming time, nothing else can be understood, but a wise and holy improvement of the present time, (to speak vulgarly, for if we speak properly and accurately, no part of time is present; the present being only an instant which is indivisible.) This wise improvement of our time with double care and diligence, may however in an improper sence be said to be a redeeming of mis-spent time that is past; namely, as it makes amends for that loss. As for Example, if a Man having play'd away, and vainly lost an hour, shall by extraordinary industry so improve the next hour as to dispatch the work of two hours therein, he may be said to have redeemed the hour that was lost. And seeing the Apostle in this place intends the redeeming of time for heavenly things, (at least principally, if not solely) as the whole series of his discourse shews, and not the redeeming it for the things

things of the World; if time be sometimes gained and improved for heavenly things with some inconvenience or prejudice to our selves in Temporals, then we redeem it in a sense not very improper; for the inconvenience or prejudice that we sustain in Temporal things, is as it were the price that we lay down to redeem it. But we need not be too Critical or Acurate in explaining a phrase where the Apostle's sense and meaning is obvious and easie to be understood. Without all question his intention in the expression of redeeming time, is only this, That we should so wisely and carefully husband and imploy it for our Spiritual advantage, as we may make the most of it toward the furthering of our Salvation; and suffer as little of it as is possible to be so laid out as no benefit may thence accrue to our Souls. And in regard 'tis no easie matter thus to improve our time for Spiritual things, there being so many things of an inferior nature that will be continually putting in for a share in our time, and rob us of it; therefore the Apostle makes the redeeming of time for Spiritual ends and purposes, one main thing in which our Circumspection should be exercised; *See that ye walk circumspectly, redeeming the time.* Thus we have the Scope of the Apostle before us. They are not Temporal, but Spiritual and Heavenly things chiefly, of which the Apostle is here discoursing; for these better and more excellent things we are exhorted to redeem the time, that is, to make the best im-

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provement of it, which by our greatest Care and Circumspection we can, and this sometimes even by undergoing some loss and prejudice in other things. In discoursing of this Subject, keeping as near the phrase in the Text as I can, I shall shew,

1. From what we must redeem the time.
2. For what we must redeem it.
3. How time is to be redeemed.
4. Why 'tis to be redeemed.

And then make Application of what shall have been delivered.

I begin with the first of these; From what must we redeem time?

I answer, we must redeem it from all those things that would seize it, and rob us of it. I shall mention some of them.

1. We must redeem time from the World. The World, if we affect it immoderately, and pursue the things thereof eagerly, will ingross to it self, and swallow up all our time leaving us none for better things, and things of higher Concernment to us.

2. We must redeem time from the Flesh. The Flesh is also craving as well as the World; it would have all our time if it might, to be spent in what may gratifie Corrupt Nature; in sleep, and ease, and pastimes, and idleness; in pleasing the Senses, and pampering the Body, and giving satisfaction to Men's Lusts.

3. We

3. We must redeem the time from Satan, who will likewise cheat us of it, and find out such employment for it, as no part of it may be gained for our Souls, if he can hinder it. Under these three, the World, the Flesh, and the Devil, may be comprehended all those things which so take up and steal away our time, as that our greatest and most important work hath the least part of it, if any part at all.

And so much concerning the first particular, from what we must redeem the time.

2. For what must time be redeemed? I answer, we must redeem the time for all those great ends and purposes for which our time here is allotted us.

As 1st. To attend upon the business of our lawful Callings, and to serve God and our Generation in the respective places and stations in which God hath set us. And here every man is to consider what that work is which God hath assigned him; what his proper business and employment is about which God hath set him; and he must be very circumspect and careful that he do not suffer needless diversions, and impertinent things to take him off from that work. And he must know, that he doth serve God in that work, as well as in Prayer, or any other spiritual Duty whatsoever. Only, great care must be taken

1. That in those his employments he do what he doth in obedience to God, and with
I 4 respect

Coloss. 3. 23. respect to his command who hath enjoined him to be diligent and industrious in his Calling; and that he eye God therein, and aim at pleasing him, and at being accepted with him; *doing every thing as unto the Lord, and not unto men*, as the Apostle exhorts.

2. He must also be careful that he be not so intent upon the World, or any worldly thing, as to neglect his Soul, and the Duties that pertain to God's immediate Worship.

Neither may it here be thought needless, that men should be called upon to redeem time for the duties of their particular Callings. For though many are too busie that way, devoting their whole time to the World; yet many others shamefully neglect their Callings, and suffer themselves to be drawn off from their business by every divertisement that comes in their way, and offers it self. How well were it for many, if they could be persuaded to redeem time from the Ale-house, from the Tavern, from the Coffee-house, for the duties of their Calling; to redeem time from their lewd Acquaintance, and idle Companions; from their wicked Complices and Associates in sin! Through their neglect to redeem and improve their time better, their poor Families may be half starved at home, while they waste their time in excess and lewdness abroad. I am apt to hope the Magistrates will do what they can to prevent or redress these lamentable Disorders, unto which there were never more temptations than in these our days there are.

2. Time

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2. Time must be redeemed for prayer, reading the Scriptures, meditation on heavenly things, self-examination, communing with your heart, and taking an account of your life. These are the things, and others of like nature, for which especially we are to redeem time, and which the Apostle chiefly aims at in this place, as hath been said.

3. Time must be redeemed for performance of the duties and offices of love to our Neighbours, whether they be such as concern their Souls, or their Bodies.

1. With relation to their Souls, time must be redeemed for teaching, instructing, counselling, advising, comforting, admonishing and reproving them, as there shall be cause for it, and as their conditions shall require it.

2. With relation to their Bodies, time must be redeemed for looking after them, providing for them, and ministring such reliefs and succours to them as they shall stand in need of. But above all, time must be redeemed for our own Souls, and for the things that refer to our spiritual and everlasting welfare.

The

and Time must be redeemed for prayer,
reading the Scriptures, meditation on holy
things, the extension of compassion
towards every being, and taking an account of
your life, & the things, and others
of like nature, for which especially we are
most concerned, and which the Apostle calls
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...and removing them, as there shall be cause
...and their consciences shall require
...thing, advising, counselling, admonishing
...permitted for teaching, instructing, coun-
...With relation to their souls, this must

[illegible]

The Sixth Sermon.

EPHES. V. 15, 16.

See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time because the days are evil.

I Come now to the third Particular, How is the time to be redeemed?

1. By using our outmost diligence to make the best improvement of it that we can. And for our help and furtherance therein, it will concern us,

1. To be careful that we rightly divide and distribute our time; allotting such a proportion of it for attending the duties of our particular Callings, so much for necessary refreshings, so much for holy duties, and so for the rest of those things which necessarily require some part of our time.

2. To be ever watchful against all Incroachers upon our time, and the principal Thieves of our time, which will be every day

day attempting to steal away some part of it. What these Thieves of time are, every one best knows, who is best acquainted with his own Temptations, and the circumstances of his Condition.

3. He should daily call himself to an account, and enquire how he hath employed his time, and what use he hath made of it. And where he finds he hath mis-spent any part of it, he should be humbled for it, and resolve to make amends by greater care in banding his time for the future. And this he should especially be careful to do, when through his carelessness he hath misemployed or vainly squandered away that time which should have been spent in the Service of God, and in the Duties that more immediately refer to his Soul, and more directly tend to promoting of the good thereof.

But you will say, If a man should every day thus reckon with himself, and call himself to an account concerning the employment of every part of his time, this would be a very irksome and tedious course. Who would endure to be so strict and severe to himself, as to be accountable to himself for every hour in the day? This were an intolerable burden, then, a yoke too heavy to be born. To this I answer,

1. That whether we be willing to be accountable to our selves for our time daily, or no, we must be accountable to God for it, for every hour of it. And the best way to

render

render our Account to God more easie, is to be daily calling our selves to an account. He that doth this, and doth it as he ought, makes even Reckonings between God and his own Soul every day.

2. We may not think to get to Heaven so easily, as to undergo nothing in our way thinner than that may be tedious and unacceptable to our corrupt Nature. They who may hope to go to Heaven, must deny themselves, and cross the sinful Inclinations of their Nature; they must ever and anon be rigid and severe to themselves; they must be willing to take pains, and to strive to enter in at the strait gate. They must give all diligence to make their calling and election sure. Forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, they must press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God. If men dream of getting to Heaven without labour and difficulty, without offering some violence to their depraved and sinful Natures, they are not likely to come thither. Undoubtedly 'tis not for nothing that our Saviour hath declared, *That narrow is the way, and strait is the gate that leadeth unto life.* 'Tis a severe passage that we have; and deserving to be seriously considered by all slothful Christians, that would go to Heaven so as it might cost them nothing; *If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear?* If the most righteous man after all the care and diligence which he hath used, and the pains which he hath taken to secure his Soul, be

Luk. 13.

24.

2 Pet. 1.

10.

Phil. 3.13.

14.

Mat. 7.14.

1 Pet. 4.

18.

be scarce saved at last; if all that he could do, be but just enough to bring him to Heaven, shall any man think to loiter away his time here, and waste it as he pleaseth, and yet make account to get to Heaven as well as those who have been most careful and solicitous, most diligent and industrious in the use of all good means, to prevent the everlasting miscarrying of their Souls? *Let no man so deceive himself; whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.* As men have been solicitous and diligent, so careless and slothful, about the concernment of their Souls here, so must they expect to be hereafter. *They that sow to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; And they that sow to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting.*

But you will say, My Condition is such, that how careful soever I be about what concerns my Soul, I can redeem but a very little time for things of that nature. My particular Calling so continually takes me up, that I can hardly gain one quarter of an hour in a day from it to be spent upon any thing else. I answer,

1. This may sometimes be through a man's own fault. Perhaps he takes more upon him, and incumbers himself with more business than he ought. No man should so intangle himself with the Affairs of this World, as to shut out better things. Better let part of the World go, than endanger the loss of your Soul. By so grasping the World, as to lose your Soul, you would be a sorry gainer in the end.

2. But supposing a man's Calling to be such, as very little time can be redeemed from it for heavenly things; yet he must remember, *that one thing is needful*; absolutely ^{Luke 10.} and indispensably necessary, and therefore ^{42.} he must find time for that one great thing, whatever else be omitted. Earthly things must so far give way to heavenly things, as that our Souls and eternal concerns be not neglected.

3. But yet however it must be considered, That God doth not require the same portion of time from all men. Persons whose Condition is low and strait, as to outward things; and some others also, whose time is necessarily and unavoidably taken up with the duties of their particular Calling, may satisfy themselves in allowing much less time for spiritual things, than others who are less straitened, and more at liberty. But as for such as have more leisure, they may not think that no more is expected of them, than of the other; *For to whom much is given, of them much shall be required.* ^{Luke 12. 48.}

And if any have so much time to spare, as they know not how to imploy it, they must know that God will take it ill at their hands, unless they measure to him in some proportion according to what they have. If they who so abound in time, should think to put off God with a small pittance of it, this were,

A great slighting of God, and would be so interpreted by him. *He is a great king,* ^{Mal. 1. 14.} and

and will accordingly be treated by his Subjects.

2. It were a great undervaluing of his Grace, as if it were either so cheap a commodity, as that it might be obtained at any rate, and with less pains than any thing else that is of any value; or so vile and worthless a thing, as that time were ill bestowed in labouring after it.

3. It were a great undervaluing of our own Souls; as if we thought so meanly of them, that we grudged any time that is bestowed on them.

4. As for those, who in respect of their Callings, and the employments in which the Providence of God hath engaged them, are much straitned in time, and cannot help it, I shall recommend these three things to them.

1. The less time they can redeem from their Callings for holy Duties, the more heavenly-minded let them labour to be while they follow their Employments; setting God much before their eyes in the duties of their Calling; endeavouring to keep a good Conscience, and to carry themselves justly and uprightly in all their dealings; and upon all occasions throughout the day sending up many short, but fervent, Prayers, and holy Exclamations unto God. So doing, they may rest assured, that they serve God acceptably in the Duties of their Calling, and shall accordingly be both accepted and rewarded. An instance hereof we may see, *Coloss. 3. 24. Eph. 6. 5.*

3. The less time they have for holy Duties, the more careful must they be, that the little time they have be not lost in a slight, careless, formal and heartless performance of holy Duties. Having but little time for such things, let them be sure they make the most of it by a truly spiritual improvement of it.

4. The less time they can redeem from their Callings in the week time, the more careful let them be to spend the Lord's Day in a due manner, and so as may best conduce to their spiritual advantage. To be able to gain very little time from their Callings throughout the week, and also to spend the Lord's Day either in idleness or pastimes, or in the meer outward formalities of Worship, void of all spiritual life and power, were the ready way to starve your Soules. Such as do this, if they had any true grace, must needs be sensible of this continual decay, and declining thereof, unless they be those that never reflect upon themselves, and take any account of the state of their Soules.

And so much touching the third particular, how Time is to be redeemed.

4. Why is Time to be redeemed? There are many reasons for it; but I shall here mention only some of them, reserving the rest to be after mentioned in the Application. We must redeem the time, *quia* *tempus est* *breve* *et* *transitorium*. Because it is a Talent for which we must give an account. Time is lent us, and put into our hands, not to be wasted and trifled away.

away as we please, but to be managed and employed, to be laid out and expended according to the pleasure of him who hath intrusted us with it. Wherefore our Account will be sad, if when we shall be called to give it in, it shall appear that we have neglected the Work; for the dispatching whereof, Time was allotted us, and spent our Time in that which was no part of our business.

21 We must redeem the Time, because our chief and most necessary Work is limited to a certain time, the time of this our temporal life here. Our most necessary and important Work here, is to make our peace with God, and get a title through Christ to a better life when this shall be at an end. Now this Work must be done here, or never; the other World is no place for it. *Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.* Mercy is here offered, and we are called on, and importuned to accept of it: but after this life, the door of Mercy will be for ever shut.

2 Cor. 6. 2.

3. The continuance and duration of the Time allotted us for this great Work is in sundry respects very uncertain.

The Life of Man is uncertain. No man knows how near he may be to his long home. This may be the last day, this the last hour that he hath to live, for ought that he can tell. Who can give him any security for the lengthening out of his life one hour more?

Pf. 31. 15.

Pfal. 104.

29.

Our times are in God's hand. When he pleaseth he takes away our breath, and we return to the dust.

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last. And he hath not thought fit to reveal or declare when, or how he will do it; he hath given us no assurance that he will not put an end to our days before we go out of this place.

2. If Life be continued, 'tis uncertain whether or no the means of grace shall be continued. Though God lengthen out mens lives, yet he often withdraws the means of grace from them; and he hath threatned to do it, where means are not improved, and where men walk unsuitably to them. Thus he threatned the *Jews* for their sins, *to take away* Matth. 21.
his kingdom from them, and to give it to a nation 43.

bringing forth the fruits thereof. And to the same effect Christ threatned the Church of *Ephesus*, saying, *Remember from whence thou* Rev. 2. 5.
art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place.

3. Though life and outward means of grace should be continued, yet God may in wrath suspend or withdraw the co-operation of his Spirit. Though the *Jews* enjoyed the ministry of the Prophet *Isaiah*, and he must prophecy to them, yet God tells him before-hand, that the issue of all his Labours among them would be no other than the hardning of them in their sins. Go, saith he, *tell this people; hear* Isa. 6. 9, 10.
ye indeed, but understand not; see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert,

vert, and be healed. The meaning is, Though God gave his Servant a Command to prophecy to them, yet for their former sins and provocations he would so give them up to the wickedness of their own hearts, that they would be never the better, but the worse, for having had a Prophet among them. A fearful thing, when those means that should open mens eyes, shall shut them; and when those means that should soften mens hearts, shall harden them. Let us take heed that this be not the case of any of us. If what should convince, humble and reform us, take no other effect upon us, but that we are so much the worse, the more remote from repentance, the more obstinately and resolutely bent after our sinful courses, the more incorrigible and irreclaimable, our Charge would be heavy when the day of reckoning comes. How dreadful and intolerable would the Sentence of Condemnation to be pronounced against us be, when the means we have enjoyed shall rise up in judgment against us, and our meritories shall condemn us.

4. As the most necessary and important work that we have to dispatch, is limited to a certain time, and the duration of that time is in divers respects very uncertain; so not to have improved that time, but to have left our greatest business undone, till it be too late, and till the only season in which it was to be done, be now over, and irrecoverably gone, is a most deplorable and dismal thing. How affectionately did our Saviour weep

over

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over Jerusalem in this respect; saying, *If thou hadst known, even thou in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.* When Mercy was offered her, and she was earnestly importuned to accept of it, she did not know the day of her visitation, as it follows, v. 44. She slighted mercy, and refused the gracious tenders thereof.

Luke 19.
41, 42.

But wherein doth the misery of such a condition lie?

I answer, in these three things.

1. Having finally refused mercy, having obstinately persisted in the refusal of it to the end, they shall never have the like offers any more. The day of grace with them is run out once for all, and shall never, never be recalled; no more opportunities of making their peace with God to eternity. The united Prayers of all the Saints in the Church-Militant and Triumphant, if they should all join together in such a Suit, could not obtain the offer of mercy for the space of one hour for any finally impenitent Sinner. He hath sinned away his mercies, and 'tis utterly impossible that he should recover what he hath wilfully deprived himself of: Lament his loss he may, and rue it he shall to eternity, but retrieve it he never shall.

2. Another thing in which the misery of this condition lies, is, that the punishment of such persons shall be dreadfully heightened upon the account of the mercy that hath been offered them, which they have so wretchedly

- sighted and rejected. The Gospel it self fully and clearly represents to us what a direful aggravation of their punishment this will be. We have three severe and most remarkable Scriptures to this purpose. *This is the condemnation, that is, the most sore and dreadful condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. Wo unto thee Corazin, wo unto thee Bethsaida; It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment, than for you. And thou Capernaum that art lifted up to heaven, (namely in the means of grace which she enjoyed, but improved not) Thou Capernaum which art lifted up to heaven, shalt be brought down to hell; it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee. How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?*
- Joh. 3. 19.
- Mat. 11.
21, 22, 23,
24.
- Heb. 2. 3.

3. The last aggravation of their misery, is this, That the thoughts of mercy once offered and rejected, and of their having wilfully made themselves eternally miserable, when they were in a capacity of being eternally happy, if they had not stood in their own light, and been wanting to themselves; I say, the thoughts hereof will be in their Consciences a never-dying Worm to torment them with unspeakable anguish to eternity. So dismal and deplorable a thing it is not to have improved the time and opportunities afforded us for making our peace with God.

And so much concerning the Reasons why we must redeem the time.

I now

I now proceed to the Application, which was the last thing to be spoken to. And here,

U S E I.

1. If Time be upon so many accounts to be redeemed, to be redeemed (especially) for heavenly things, and to be improved for the good of our Souls; what may they think of themselves, who make little other use of their time, than to dishonour God, debauch their Acquaintants and Companions in sin, and to bring swift ruin and destruction upon their own Souls? who redeem time indeed, but 'tis for the satisfaction of their Lusts, for gratifying their Corruptions, for glutting themselves with sinful Pleasures, and sensual Delights, for heaping up sin upon sin, for filling up the measure of their Provocations, and making themselves ripe for judgment. That spend their time in excess and intemperance, in riot and drunkenness, in chambering and wantonness, in setting their mouths against Heaven, in belching out horrid Oaths and Blasphemies, in scoffing at Religion, and deriding Piety; that make it their business to sow the Principles of Atheism, and to scatter the Seeds of Irreligion and Profaneness in all Places and Companies where they come; to seduce, poison and corrupt all they meet with, and to make them twofold more the children of Hell than themselves. O how many such wicked Instruments, such Agitators for Hell, and

Factors for the Devil, have our times produced! How doth City and Countrey abound with them! and what swarms of them are there to be found in all Quarters of the Land!

Though such as these come seldom to the House of God, yet in regard they sometimes drop in amongst others; and in regard that no Congregation (if numerous at least) can be presumed to be without many lewd and vicious Persons, though perhaps there may not be many that have arrived at the same height and excess of wickedness with these before-mentioned:

I shall propose these three Questions to all those who spend their precious time in lewd and ungodly Practises, of what kind soever; or rather, I shall desire they would propose them to themselves.

I. Let them ask themselves, put the question to their own Hearts and Consciences, Whether they think, or can think, that God made them, and gave them excellent and immortal Souls to these ends? If they think he did, then it seems they are of opinion, that God gave them a being, to the end they might renounce their homage, and disclaim their subjection to him, and serve the Devil: And that he still preserves them, upholds them in their being, to no other purpose, than that they may still go on in the same ways of open rebellion against himself, and defiance against Heaven. Certainly it were an

an high disparagement, and an horrid derogation to the wisdom and holiness of God, for any man to imagine that God should make men, give them a being, continue being to them, and lengthen out their lives, that they might thus run out their time, and spend their days in a course of constant opposition and defiance against him that made them. Well then, you must be enforced to acknowledge, if you consider the matter, that God gave you being, and allots you time here for other purposes than those to which you apply it.

2. Ask your selves also whether you think there is no account to be given unto God of your time? If you allow your Servant time for dispatching the work which you have enjoined him, and you find the work undone when you come to view it, you call him to account for the time you gave him, and will know how he hath imployed it; whether he hath spent it in idleness, or what is worse; and do you think that God will not have an account from you of your time? Will he be less severe and exact in reckoning with you for your time, than you are in reckoning with your Servant for it?

3. Ask your self one question more, to wit, Whether you think that still going on at this rate as you do, you shall be able with comfort to give up your account hereafter to God of the use you have made of your time? A true and just account must be given in whether you will or no; and how then will your account

account run, and what will the style of it be? So much of your time spent in Drinking, and Carousing, and Swearing; so much in Chambering and Wantonness, and in whatever is not to be named; so much in Profane and Atheistical Drolleries, and in making a mock of Sin, yea, of Piety, Religion, and Sobriety; so much in traducing and reproaching others, in impairing their Reputation, and wounding their good Name; so much in railing, somenting and spreading evil Reports; so much in speaking against your Brother, and flandering your own Mothers Son; so much in labouring to Infect, Poyson, and seduce your Friends and Acquaintance, and to ingage them in the same vicious and ungodly practises with your self: What think you of such a Bill as this? Do you not even tremble at the thought of giving in to God such an account of your time? *Jezebel* was severely threatned because space being given her to repent, *she repented not*; What shall be their doom, who having space given them to repent, do not only neglect to repent, but consume, and lavishly mispend the whole time allotted them for that Duty, in all manner of wicked and abominable practices? And so much of that first Use.

USE 2.

If time be upon so many accounts to be redeemed, and if it must be redeemed (especially) for heavenly things; then what may they

they think of themselves who trifle away their time vainly and fruitlessly? Who, instead of redeeming the time, study and contrive how they may be rid of it upon any terms? Time is a burthen to them, they know not what to do with it. They are at some pains in devising and inventing Arts to pass it away. As if Time stayed too long with them, and did not run out fast enough of it self. Now as for you that have so much time to spare, that are so much troubled with it, and know not how to bestow it, or dispose of it; let me put these questions to you also.

1. Have you done your great work? Have you made your peace with God? Have you gotten the pardon of your Sins? 'Tis very much to be feared, that such as are thus troubled to know how to pass away their time, and spend it so vainly, have done little towards that great and weighty business.

2. Do you know the greatness and difficulty of this work? Do you know how much time it may require? Tho' you should begin to set about it immediately, and use your utmost diligence about it, yet seeing you have so long delayed it, and put it off; seeing you have undervalued and slighted the offers of Mercy, God may justly make you wait long before you be upon good grounds satisfied touching your peace with him.

3. Do you know how short the remainder of your time may be? Do you know how soon Death may surprize you, and how few steps

steps there may be between you and the Grave? You cannot tell but that this may be the last day that you have to live, and that to morrow your Soul may be in another World, and so beyond all possibility of making your peace with God.

4. Do you consider how different your Thoughts and valuation of Time may be when you come to die, from what they now are? Then you may so value it, as you may be willing to give the whole World, if you had it, to purchase one day, to purchase a few hours to obtain, if it be possible, the forgiveness of your sins *before you go hence and be seen no more*, before your Soul bid an everlasting farewell to all things under the Sun, and enter upon Eternity.

5. Do you consider the high and everlasting consequence of your employing your time while you are here? Do you consider that your endless and unspeakable happiness or misery depends on the improving or not improving of this Moment of your abode here? For a Moment 'tis, and no other in comparison of Eternity. Assuredly if these things were thoroughly pondered, you would not count time so cheap and inconsiderable a thing, that you should contrive and cast about how to send it going as fast as you can.

U S E 3.

If we must redeem the time, and if we must redeem it especially for heavenly things, then

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then how much are they to be blamed, who devote all their time to the World! the World they wholly mind, the World they pursue, the World so fills their hands and their heads that there is no room left for heavenly things. But how is it, that Men who know they have Immortal Souls, should act so irrationally, and steer their course so directly contrary to their highest Interest? A Man would think it were easie to convince men of their Folly herein, and to reason them out of it. For,

1. Is men's Temporal welfare to be preferred before their Eternal well-being? Is the World more to them than their Souls? What comparifon is there between them? *What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his Soul?*

Mark 8.

36.

2. What are the things of the World in pursuit whereof you are so much taken up? Are they any better than so much *thick Clay*, if compared with heavenly things? Are they not vile, worthless, contemptible things in comparifon of the pardon of your sins, the favour of God, Grace, Holiness, an Interest in Christ, and through him a Title to Eternal Happiness in the other World? Are not these things, and these only the *true* Riches?

or 1 do
Hab. 2. 6.

Luke 16.
11.

3. Are not the best, the surest, the most stable of all earthly things *uncertain*? Do they not suddenly make them wings, and flee away as an Eagle towards heaven?

1 Tim. 6.
17.
Prov. 23. 5.

4. Though

4. Tho' there were the richest confluence of them, and tho' a man did even wallow in them, would they ever be able to make his Life comfortable, truly comfortable, without the favour of God, and peace of Conscience? Hathi not Solomon, who knew how to estimate them, pronounced them all Vanity, *vanity of vanities, yea vanity and vexation of spirit?* Instead of making men truly happy, do they not wound and pierce them through with many sorrows, who greedily cover after them, and set their hearts upon them?

Ecc. 1. 2.
Ver. 14.

1 Tim. 6.
10.

Prov. 11. 4.

5. Can they stand you in any stead in an evil day? Solomon again tells you, *Riches profit not in the day of wrath.*

6. However it be, though these things should still continue with you, yet you cannot always continue with them to enjoy them; though they should not leave you, yet you must shortly leave them, be rent away from them all, and go naked out of the world.

Job. 1. 10.

And so much may suffice to have been spoken to these three sorts of people that so ill bestow their time, which ought to have been redeemed for better purposes; such as spend their time wickedly, such as spend it vainly, and such as suffer the World to swallow it up, and devour it.

U S E 4.

Now in the last place, let us all labour to be humbled for the loss of our time, and be careful to husband it better for the future.

I. Let

min. Let us labour to be humbled for the loss of our time. And O how much time have we all lost, even those of us who seem to have been most careful to improve it!

How much time hath been spent idly! How much hath run out fruitlessly while we yielded to, and gratified our lazy and slothful Nature!

2. How much in impertinent and unprofitable Visits, that signified nothing, that were not in the least improved to the benefit of our own or other mens Souls, or to any other real advantage of our selves or them!

3. How much in dressing and adorning the Body, in decking and beautifying that corruptible part which must shortly be Meat for Worms!

4. How much hath been spent in vain thoughts, idle phantasies, fruitless projectings, distrustful cares! How much of our time by day and by night have these impertinencies eaten up and devoured!

5. How much of our time hath passed away in unprofitable talk, in empty and frothy discourses, and too often in unsavoury and corrupt communication!

6. How much hath been spent in Gaming and Pastimes, in needless Recreations and Diversions!

7. How much in pampering the Body, and gratifying the Flesh with sensual Pleasures!

8. How much of that part of our time which we think to have been best imployed; I say, how much of that hath been laid out on things of less concernment to us, while our highest concernments have been shamefully neglected! How careful have many of us been about our worldly business, that no time or opportunities for temporal advantages might be lost, while the one thing needful hath been least minded! O how few hours in a Week, or perhaps in a Month have we redeemed for secret Prayer, Self-examination and communing with our own hearts, for stating matters aright between God and our own Souls! How few hours have we redeemed for seeking God, and making Intercession for a sinful Nation! How few for turning away the wrath of God that hangs over our heads, and for averting of those heavy Judgments which our horrid Provocations deserve, and daily threaten us with! I say, we have all very much cause to be humbled, that while we have suffered poor and inconsiderable things to steal away and to inhance so much of our time, these great and important matters have had so small a share of it.

2. Let us all be stirred up to improve our time better for the future, redeeming as much of it as we can for the purposes before mentioned relating to the good of our own and other mens Souls, and to the present sad condition of the Kingdom. And the more effectually to provoke us hereunto, let us,

1. Lay before us that which hath been last spoken of; let us consider how much time we have already mis-spent, some in one kind, and some in another. I scarce know what stronger motive can be made use of to prevail with us to redeem the time than this. Having mis-spent and lost so much time already, doth it not highly concern us to make better use of what remains? Especially if we likewise consider, that as we have mis-spent much time already, so we know not how little remains to be better employed.

2. Consider, that when you have been as good an husband of your time as 'tis possible; yet it cannot be but that much of it must have been lost, notwithstanding all the care that hath been taken to prevent the loss of it. Much of our time runs out in sleep, much in eating and drinking, and other ways of necessary refreshing; much in those unavoidable diversions which every day we meet with. How much of our time do these things take up! Certainly the far greater part of every four and twenty hours is thus employed, unless we be more provident than most men are, yea unless we be extraordinary husbands of time, and rare patterns of the well-managing and improving thereof.

3. Hereunto add the motive in the Text, *Let us redeem the time, because the days are evil.* And evil they are both in respect of the evil of Sin, and the many Temptations thereunto; and in respect of the evil of Affliction and Punishment, which our Sins either
L
have

have already brought upon us, or threaten us with.

I. The days are evil in respect of Sin, and the many Temptations thereunto. Never did, as I think, Sin more abound, than in these our days; never was it more shameless and impudent; never was there, I think, a greater deluge of Wickedness in City and Country, considering what means there are to prevent it: And never were there so many temptations to Sin, what by Seducers that compass Sea and Land to make Profelytes, Profelytes to *Rome*, and Profelytes to I know not how many pernicious Sects, in great part created and fomented by Factors for *Rome*, and set a work and imployed by them; and what by other Instruments which the Devil hath in all places to debauch men, and make them Atheists in Opinion, or in Life and Conversation; either practical or speculative Atheists, or both. Was there ever such an Atheistical Age as ours is, when so many espouse and avow Atheism, when they blush not openly to profess it, when they plead for it, when they dispute for it, when they do all they can to spread and propagate it; and when so many more live like perfect Atheists, frame their lives no otherwise than they would or could do, if they verily believed that there is neither God nor Devil, neither Heaven or Hell? O the sad condition of our Age! that a Nation that hath had the light of the Gospel so long, and so clearly shining amongst them;

them; that hath been, as it were, lifted up to Heaven in the means of Grace, and that hath been honoured and dignified with so many signal Deliverances, by which God hath from Heaven born witness, and given testimony to the Truth which we profess, should, after all this, so wretchedly apostatize and decline both in Opinion and Practice, in Doctrine and Manners! In respect of Sin and Temptations our days are evil with a witness; so evil, that 'tis not easie to conceive how they can be much worse, or what farther degrees of wickedness men can arrive at.

2. The days are evil in respect of the evil of Affliction and Punishments which our Sins have brought upon us, and further threaten us with.

1. They are evil days in respect of the Afflictions and Punishments which our Sins have brought upon us. What Effusion of Blood at home and abroad, by Sea and by Land! What vast expence of Treasure! What weakning and impairing of mens Estates! What Mortality in our memory by a most grievous and terrible Pestilence raging in the Metropolis, and in divers other parts of the Kingdom! What dreadful Fires in the Head City, and in many other places beyond all that any of our Histories make any report to have been in this Land! Heretofore, as far as I have heard or read of, so many, and such terrible Fires within the like space of time to have been in this Kingdom, no Memorials

of former Times (for ought I know) give us any account of.

2. As the days are evil, in respect of the fore Afflictions and heavy Judgments which our Sins have already brought upon us, so are they evil also in respect of the Judgments which they further threaten us with. The Apostle long since foretold, that *in the last days perilous times should come*. Such are our times. There was never a time since the Reformation, when our just fears and dangers were greater than of late they have been. Neither the *Spanish* Invasion of Eighty Eight, nor the Gunpowder Plot, (though horrid Attempts both of them) exceeded the Bloody and Fatal designs of the Enemies of Church and State in our days.

2 Tim. 3. 1.

O then, how much doth it concern us to redeem the time, *because the days are evil*! To redeem it, for giving *all diligence to make our calling and election sure*, and for settling matters right between God and our own Souls; to redeem time for getting strength to keep our selves untainted with the Corruptions of the Times, and strength against the Assaults of the many dangerous and powerful Temptations which we meet with: to redeem time for seeking God, and for offering up to him our most fervent and uncessant Supplications for confounding the wicked Devices, for defeating the Bloody Counsels and Barbarous Designs, and for breaking in pieces the Diabolical Combinations and Traiterous Conspiracies of unreasonable men, that are skilful to destroy!

To

To redeem time, for seeking God in behalf of the Reformed Churches abroad, groaning under the sad Miseries and Calamities of War and Persecution; to redeem time, to humble our selves for our manifold Sins and Provocations here at home, and for averting those heavy Judgments, which we may fear are hanging over our heads, and hastening to come upon us, and may speedily overtake us, and surprize us, if by our timely Humiliation and sincere Repentance we prevent it not.

These are, I hope, sufficient Reasons for prevailing with us to dispose of our time in such a manner as Religion, the Concernments of our own Souls, and the Publick Welfare of Church and State may have a good proportion of it. And the worse the times are we live in, the more careful should we be to redeem it.



to redeem them, for looking down in the
hell of the Reformed Church, and seeing
the under the old British and the British of
War and Persians; to redeem them, to
enable our lives for our British and
Persians, to be at home, and for saving
those heavy judgments, which we may fear
are hanging over our heads, and listening
to come upon us, and may possibly overtake
us, and destroy us, if by our British and
Persians and British Persians we prevent it
not.

These are, I hope, sufficient reasons for
preaching with us to those of our time in
such a manner as Religion, and Concern-
ments of our own souls, and the British Wel-
fare of Church and State may have a good
proportion of it. And the worse the times
are we live in, the more careful should we be
to redeem it.

The Seventh Sermon.

3 Ep. J O H. V. 3.

*Beloved, thou dost faithfully whatsoever
thou dost to the brethren, and to
strangers.*

THIS short Epistle of St. *John* was written to *Gains*, a sincere and zealous Christian. Where he lived, and to what Church he belonged, is uncertain. But wheresoever his abode was, whether at *Corinth*, *Derbe*, or at *Ephesus*, or some-where else, 'tis evident that he was a man eminent for Religion, and greatly useful in his place. The chief intention of St. *John* in writing this Epistle to him, seems to have been, that he might let him know how much he rejoiced to hear of the grace of God in him, and that he might encourage him to go on and persevere in the profession and practice of the truth which he had entertained.

The Seventh Sermon.

In the words which I have made choice of, we have the principal thing which the Apostle here takes notice of in him, commendeth him for, and encourageth him in; and that is, his Charity and Hospitality to the Saints, in relieving them, and giving entertainment to them, or rather his uprightness and sincerity therein; *Thou dost faithfully whatsoever thou dost to the brethren, and to strangers.* Which words, that they are to be understood of his Charity in relieving, and of his Hospitality in entertaining the Saints, is manifest from what follows concerning the same Subject, in the 8th, 9th and 10th Verses. *Thou dost faithfully whatsoever thou dost to the brethren, and to strangers.* By the Brethren, we may understand those who were of the same Church with *Gains*, or at least of the same City where his Habitation was: and by Strangers, those other Christians, who either through persecution were constrained to come thither for shelter, or whose necessary business and secular affairs drew them thither; or lastly, who came to preach the Gospel, as it seems they did, who are intended in the 7th and 8th Verses, concerning whom the Apostle saith, that for his Name's sake, that is, for Christ's sake, they went forth, taking nothing of the *Gentiles*; and that therefore Christians who were of ability ought to receive them, that they might thereby be Fellow-helpers to the Truth, and promote the propagation of the Gospel. And though these also were Brethren in a more general sense;

sense; yet being Strangers, those other at home might in a stricter sense be so called, as being Brethren, not only in respect of their common Faith and Profession of the same Christian Religion, but also in respect of their more particular relation to one another, as fellow-members of the same Church, or Inhabitants of the same City.

Now whereas among many other good things, which without all question were to be found in *Gaius*, the Apostle singles out this particular, *That he did faithfully whatsoever he did in way of charity and kindness, both to the brethren, and to strangers*; And whereas he doth not so much commend him for the thing done, how good soever in it self considered, as for the manner of doing it; We may hence observe,

That 'tis a great duty of a Christian to do every thing faithfully. In treating of which point, I shall,

1. Shew what it is to do all things faithfully; or wherein this Faithfulness lies, and what the ingredients of it are.

2. Why 'tis so great a Duty, and what Reasons there are why so much stress should be laid upon it. And

3. I shall apply what shall have been spoken.

I begin with the *first* of these, which was, to shew what it is to do every thing faithfully. In the general, to do any thing faithfully, is nothing else but to do it sincerely,
and

2 Kings.

20. 3.

Coloss. 3.

23.

and in singleness of heart, as looking unto God therein. This *Ezekiah* expresseth, by *walking before God in truth, and with a perfect heart.* And the Apostle expresseth it, by *doing every thing heartily as unto the Lord, and not unto men.* Now herein there are these things comprehended.

1. That we be careful to look to it, that whatsoever we do, is agreeable to our Master's Will; that his pleasure be the Rule by which we are guided in our Actions; that we do nothing but what we know he commands or allows; and that we do not in any thing prefer our own Will before his; for that's one point of Faithfulness in every Servant, to keep close to his Commission, and the pleasure of his Master. This God much insists on. *Whatsoever thing I command you, observe to do it; thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it, Deut. 12. 32. Ye shall observe to do as the Lord your God hath commanded you; ye shall not turn aside to the right hand, or to the left, Deut. 5. 32.* And this exact observation of the Rule, and strict adherence thereunto, is required even in those cases wherein our Reason, perhaps, may present and dictate somewhat else to be done, rather than what God commandeth. We must hearken to no suggestions of carnal Reason, where the pleasure of God, for the contrary, is clearly revealed to us. This God often cautions his People against; *Ye shall not do after all that ye do this day, every man what is good*

gold in his eyes, Deut. 12. 8. 'So Numb. 15. 39. God would have his People of Israel look upon the fringe which he had enjoined should be upon the borders of their garments, that they might remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them; and not seek after their own heart, and their own eyes; that is, that they might not do that which they had a mind to do, and which their own depraved reason and sense dictated to them, and led them unto, contrary to the Word of God. So then, that's the first thing required in Faithfulness, that we do what we have God's command or allowance for, not preferring our will before his in any thing, nor so leaning to our own understanding, as to be thereby drawn aside to the one hand, or the other.

2. In matters of duty, he that would do what he doth faithfully, must not only do what is commanded him, but do it in obedience to God, and with respect to his Command. A Servant is not to be reputed faithful merely because he doth what is agreeable to his Master's will, unless he do it in obedience; and because he is commanded; unless he eye his Master's Command, and do what he doth with respect thereunto. A man may do many things that are commanded, for his own bye ends, and with respect to somewhat else, rather than his Master's command; yea, though he do what is commanded, yet perhaps his Master's command had no influence upon him at all, and he would never have done it, unless there had been somewhat

what else to induce him thereunto, besides his Master's pleasure. Your Servant hath a mind to go to such a place, and thither he would have gone although you should have forbidden him: You command him to go thither, and he goes; but doth he not go in his own Errand more than yours, who would have gone thither, though you had sent him a contrary way? So God commands us many things which suit well with a man's worldly Interests and Designs, and thereupon a man doth what he is commanded, but not so much because 'tis commanded, as because it furthers his own secular Advantages, and worldly Ends. Doth he herein what he doth faithfully? Doth he sincerely serve his Master, or rather doth he not serve himself? Instances in this kind are easily to be found. To be diligent in a man's Calling, to be as good as a man's word, and as we say, to keep touch punctually with every one with whom a man hath any thing to do; to deal justly and fairly with all men; these are things which God strictly enjoins, and which he lays much weight on; but they are also things which make much for a man's Reputation in the World, which make others willing to imploy him, to deal with him, and trust him, and consequently which much conduce to the advancing of a man's worldly Estate. Now how many are there who do all those external things which God hath commanded, but without any respect at all to his command, and purely with respect to their worldly Interest,

terest, that they may preserve their Reputation, have much trading, or be much trusted and imployed some other way, and thereby improve their Estates, and raise their Families. Now though such men may truly be said to deal faithfully with men, yet can they never be said to do what they do faithfully in reference to God, because doing nothing of all this with respect to him, and in obedience to his command, they are not in truth so much his Servants in what they do, as their own. To do such things as these, and all other things faithfully, in reference to God; to do them as *Gaius* did, is to do them with an eye on God, and with respect to his command. This was *David's* care, to have respect unto all God's commandments. To look at the Command of God, and to do every thing as desiging and aiming at a conformity thereunto: This is to do things in singleness of heart, as unto Christ, Eph. 6. 5. And heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto men, as before, Coloss. 3. 23. Psal. 119. 6.

3. To do any thing faithfully, is to do it from due motives, and to right ends, when the motives and ends of our Actions, which set us a work, and put us on, are such as God requires and approves of: Such as are,

1. His Glory: This ought to be the principal end in all our Actions. *Whether ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.* 1 Cor. 10. 31. And to be sure, there is no lawful Action

Action, but is some way or other referrible to God's Glory; for otherwise, how could we be enjoined to do every thing to God's Glory? If there were any good Action incapable of being referred to that end, it had been in vain to require that of us.

2. Another end which we are to propound to our selves, and aim at in our Actions, is, That we may thereby please God, and have acceptance with him. The Apostle, exhorting to a charitable relieving of those who are in want, draws an Argument to persuade thereunto, from the acceptance that it hath with God; thereby giving us to understand, that God's being pleased with what we do, and his acceptance of us, ought to be one great thing in our eye whatsoever we do; *To do good, and to communicate, forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.* The same Argument he useth, exhorting Children to be obedient to their Parents; *Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.* It was therefore David's earnest prayer unto God, that all his thoughts and words might be pleasing to God; *Let the words of my mouth, and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.* And this was St. Paul's great care and endeavour; *We labour* (saith he) *that whether absent or present, we may be accepted of him.* And his Prayer in behalf of the Colossians was, *that they might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing.*

3. Another end that we should propound to our selves in our Actions, is the good of others, according to the nature and tendency of the Action, and so far as 'tis referrible to the good of our Brethren. *Let all things be done with charity,* saith the Apostle. Now Charity hath a respect, not only to our own benefit, but also to the benefit of others. And again, *Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth.* Let him not seek his own wealth, his own profit or advantage alone, his own to the detriment, prejudice or hindrance of his Brother, but his Brother's as well as his own, and together with it.

1 Cor. 16.

14.

1 Cor. 10.

24.

And thus we have seen what it is to do whatsoever a man doth faithfully: He doth every thing faithfully, who is carefully solicitous in all things to have his warrant or allowance from the Word of God; who in matters of duty hath an eye at God's Command, and doth not only what is commanded, but because 'tis commanded; and lastly, who doth all things from due motives, and to right ends.

Now in the second place, why is it so great a thing, a Duty of that importance to a Christian, *to do whatsoever he doth faithfully*? There are divers reasons hereof.

1. Without this faithfulness no service is valued or accepted of God; who looks more after this, than any thing else; and where 'tis wanting, there the most specious, the most splendid and glorious Services in his account signify little or nothing, whatever esteem

Prov. 15. 8.

steem men may have of them. Whence is it that the very Sacrifices of the wicked, the best things they do, are so far from being pleasing unto God, that they are an abomination to him? Is it not because they do nothing faithfully? Is it not because their hearts being rotten and unsound, they do nothing sincerely in obedience to God, nothing from due motives and principles, nothing to right ends? Certainly this is one thing, and not the least, that makes all their performances stink in the nostrils of God. Though the sinfulness of their persons otherwise, and the wickedness of their lives make God abhor their Services, as he often declares; yet this very thing, That they do nothing faithfully, as unto God, in that manner, with that frame of heart, and to those ends which he requires, is that which maketh their best Actions yet more abominable to him, as they come from them, and are performed by them. This is that which *Solomon* seems to intend, and the account which he seems to give of this mat-

Prov. 21.
27.

The sacrifice of the wicked, saith he, is abomination to the Lord; how much more when he bringeth it with a wicked mind? As if he had said, Tho' the wickedness of his life be enough to make God loath every thing he doth, even his very Sacrifice; yet that he bringeth it with a wicked mind, that pretending to worship God his heart is false and deceitful, that he hath base ends and designs of his own in what he would be thought to do for God, and to God; this is that which makes his Services

Services much more odious and abominable unto him.

2. There is no Service so mean, contemptible and worthless in man's account, but is both accepted and rewarded of God, if it be done faithfully. *Whoever shall give to any one but a cup of cold water to drink in Christ's name, and because he belongs to him, to a disciple in the name of a disciple, as such, and upon that account, he shall in no-wise lose his reward.* A man may give far greater things than a Cup of cold water, and that to a Disciple too, and yet shall he have no reward from God, if he give it upon some other undue consideration, and for some bye ends of his own; but let him do what he doth faithfully and sincerely to a Disciple in the Name of a Disciple, and he shall not lose his reward, though he give him but a Cup of cold water to drink. He may be apt to think that so poor a thing as that is, shall never be so far regarded, or taken notice of, as to be rewarded; but Christ with much earnestness hath declared so much, and assured him, that so mean a thing as that is, so done, shall not go unrewarded. Our Saviour, to ratify his Promise so much the more, and to make it the stronger, useth such a manner of speech as hath a double emphasis in it: He doth not barely affirm it, but he doth it with a serious and solemn Asseveration, *And, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward;* and again, *And whosoever shall give to any one of these my little ones, he shall in no-wise lose his reward.* The poor Widow's two Mites which made but a Far-

Mark 9.

42.

Matth 10.

42.

M

thing,

Mark 12.
42, 43.

thing, were but a poor matter, a slender gift to be cast into the Treasury ; but yet doing what in that kind she was able, faithfully and sincerely no doubt, what gracious acceptance had it with Christ, and what honourable mention doth he make of it? *Verily I say unto you* (said he to his Disciples) *that this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury.* 'Tis true, others cast in out of their abundance, but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living, as Christ there adds; and this indeed was a great thing; but unless she had done it sincerely and faithfully, her action had never had that high acceptance with Christ; if pride and vain-glory, or any other base aim had been at bottom, Christ the searcher of the heart would have discerned it, and instead of commending the action, would have abhorred it. In the 6th Chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians, v 5, 6, 7, 8, the Apostle exhorting poor Servants to discharge them due to their master according to the flesh, faithfully, and faithfully also to their Master in Heaven, in singleness of heart, as unto Christ; and again, Not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; and yet once more, with good-will, doing service as to the Lord, and not to men; he encourageth them thereunto from the consideration of the reward of this their service which they may expect from God; Knowing, saith he, that whatsoever good thing any man doth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond

bond or free. What, tho he be not only a Servant, but a Bond-man, wholly at the command, and under the power of his Master, and by him imployed in the meanest services, and put to the basest drudgery, and enforced to bestow all his time, and lay out all his strength that way; may this poor Bond-man, this contemptible and miserable Slave, expect any reward of these his Services from God? Yes, that he may, and he shall be sure not to lose his reward, if he do what he doth sincerely and faithfully, if he obey his Master, and serve him faithfully in obedience to God, and do even his basest drudgery in *singleness of heart as to Christ, and as to the Lord, and not to man*: Be he a free-man, or a bond-man; be his services and employments honourable or base, all is one with God, faithfulness is that which God looks after; whatsoever is done faithfully, and by whomsoever, it shall be accepted and rewarded.

3. Where this faithfulness is wanting, there the better our Services are, for substance, the more notoriously and grossly do we play the Hypocrites. For in such Services we do in special manner pretend to honour God, and seek his Glory, which when 'tis only pretended, and we really mind nothing less than what we make shew of, how odious and abominable is this in the sight of God, *who is a Spirit, and will be served in Spirit and in Truth.* God is not mocked; that is, he is not deluded, and put off with outward shews and appearances instead of realities, as men may be who look upon the outward appearance, but cannot look into the heart. M 2 So

Gal. 6. 7.

So I have done with the two former things propounded, having shewed what it is to do every thing faithfully; and why this is so great and so important a Duty.

I now come to make Application, which was the third thing propounded.

U S E.

This presents just matter of Humiliation to us all, even to the best amongst us, in regard there is so little, so very little of this faithfulness to be found in our Actions and Services. We may be apt to think we have done a great deal of good several ways, and so please our selves in the expectation of our reward; but if things be well examined, how little shall we be found to have done, that will be approved of, and further our account hereafter? How much Pride, Vain-glory and Hypocrisy? how much seeking of our selves, and our own things, instead of seeking the Glory of God, and the Things of Christ! How many of the good things which we have done, have been done by us upon other lower Considerations than the command of God; from other Motives, and to other Ends, than that we might thereby honour and please him, and be accepted with him! Instances of our miscarriages this way might be endless, almost, if the time would permit, and it were expedient to enlarge so much. I shall touch at some few instances, that by our failings in them we may be the better able to understand our selves, and know how we ought

to judge of our selves in reference to the rest of our Life, and the various passages thereof.

My first instance shall be that in which many here present are concerned, and 'tis that of mens Employment in the way of their Trade and Commerce with others among whom their dealing is. This is the main business of their Life, and takes up the most considerable part of their time; to which I may also add, that 'tis the business on which their parts and strength are mostly laid out. Great pity therefore it were that little of what they do in this way should turn to their account hereafter, as undoubtedly it will not, unless it be done faithfully and sincerely, as unto God, and not to men. And yet here, how common a thing is it with most men in their Trading to look no further than their own outward Advantage, and the procuring a competent, or a fair and comfortable Livelihood and Subsistence for themselves and theirs? Where almost is the Person to be found, who doth every thing in the way of that his Calling, as unto God, and not to men, who sets God before his Eyes as much as may be all the day long; who treats with every man he deals with, or hath to do with throughout the day, as in God's sight; who seeks and consults the good of others as well as his own, in every Bargain he makes, in every parcel of Ware he sells or buys; in a word, who dischargeth all the Duties of his particular Calling with a respect to God's com-

mand, with an eye at pleasing him, and being accepted of him. Lay your hands upon your Breasts, and ask your own hearts, whether this be your daily practice, and what experimental acquaintance you have with these things. If you reflect upon your self impartially, and search narrowly, 'tis to be feared that you will find too much cause to be humbled for your failings.

A second instance I shall give in those who are intrusted with the managing other mens Businessses and Affairs in any kind, in which their Industry, Skill, Ability, and Faithfulness is required; They are diligent and industrious in the ways of their Employment, they have a care so to manage the Businessses put into their hands, and committed to their trust, as they may be able to give a good account of them, and to approve themselves faithful to those by whom they are intrusted, as it concerns them to be with respect to their Reputation, and their worldly Advantage also; for if they should be slack, careless, and unfaithful, who would make use of them, or imploy them? Who would care to intrust them with any business of Concernment? But in the mean time, while for their own ends they are thus careful to approve themselves faithful to men, where is their faithfulness to God? Are they as careful and solicitous how they may approve themselves to him in every business they manage, how they may please him, and be accepted of him? That some are so, can be it from me to questi-

only but Oh how few are these men? And how rarely to be found among many who forget much God at all, and who is hardly in all their Thoughts! A third instance may be in the poorer sort, who are very painful and industrious in their day; for such many of the poorer sort are; (though many others of them eat the Bread of idleness, and will do it, for their hands refuse to labour, and they will not have honest Employment when they may;) but I say, those before spoken of, are diligent and industrious; they rise betimes in the morning, they follow their work closely all the day, and go late to bed at night; a very commendable thing in them, and greatly to be encouraged; but yet alas! What's their great end in all this? What do they aim at? Nothing else but that they may eat a piece of Bread, that they may have wherewithal to keep themselves and their Relations alive, if any they have? Do they mind God in their Employment? Are they diligent in their Calling, because he commands them so to be? And do they in that way of their Employment intend the seeking of his Providence? And do they seek his Glory in that their low condition of Life? Do they humbly and contentedly submit to his Providence in this disposing of things, and in allotting them so slender a portion of the things of this Life, and putting them to get their Livelihood in so painful and labourous a way? And lastly, as low as their condition is, do they seek to honour

honour God in it as much as they can? If they do so, then they do faithfully what they do in their mean condition; and they may assure themselves, that as their eye is on God, so God's eye is on them, he takes notice of their faithfulness, and will assuredly reward it. But how few are they who look so high as to mind God at all, or in the least study to approve themselves to him?

A fourth instance shall be in Servants. Though there were never more complaints of the carelessness and unfaithfulness of Servants, and perhaps never more cause for such complaints; yet there are those who are diligent and faithful, and cannot justly be charged with idleness or unfaithfulness, or with any of those other usual faults for which Servants are blamed. And yet even amongst these who are the best, and most careful to please those whom they serve, and who do all they can to give them content, how few are there whose eyes are upon their Master in Heaven, and whose greatest care it is so to discharge the Duty of their places, as to please him: Who, according to the Apostle's injunction before mentioned, do service with singleness of heart, as to the Lord, and not unto men! Who do all the service which they owe to man, as unto Christ, studying to please him therein, and expecting their Wages and Reward from him! For the most part, even the better sort of Servants, look no farther than their Masters here on Earth; as for God, their Master in Heaven, is scarce in all their

their thoughts to please him; and yet without a care and study to please him, they are but men-pleasers, as the Apostle calls them, Eph. 6. 6. and must never expect either reward or acceptance from God.

5. Another instance may be in Parents and Children; to put them together. As for many Parents, they are not without natural Love, Affection and Tenderness for their Children in their younger years: they are willing to take any pains with them, they can cheerfully undergo much trouble for them; and when they are grown up, they are full of careful thoughts about them, and so studious of their temporal welfare, that they think they can never do enough to promote it. And yet 'tis possible that very little of all this may be done in obedience to God, and with respect to his Authority and Command, who as he hath furnished them with natural Affections to put them on to do for their Children; so he hath by his command made it their Duty; without regard of which command, they do these things no otherwise than the brute Beasts feed, tender, and protect their young by natural Instinct, and from that ~~sens~~, or inbred Affection, which both strongly inclines them to do it, and enables them to do it with delight and pleasure. That many Parents are led to all that careful and solicitous travel and labour of Love which they undergo for Children, by no higher Principles or Inducements, is manifest, because if the command of God did prevail with

with them, it would also make them conscientiously Industrious in discharging their Duty to their Souls, which God hath as strictly enjoined, and which he looks after as much, yea much more, as the Soul is more worth, and the everlasting miscarrying thereof of higher consequence than that of their temporal welfare. But here how miserably do they neglect them, and betray their Souls to Sin, Satan and Hell! While they neither bestow any pains upon them to instruct them in the Principles of Religion, and their Duty to God; nor use any effectual means for preventing and restraining Sin in them. But neither is this the only evidence of their performing no part of their Duty to them in obedience to God; for if they did, then would the same command and authority of God also ingage them to reform their own Lives, and frame their Conversations according to the Rule; then would they not, as many of them do, allow themselves in sinful ways, slighting God's Authority, and casting his Word behind their back.

And what hath been spoken of Parents, the same likewise may be said of Children. I speak of Children grown up to years of some discretion, and able to put a difference between good and evil. They obey their Parents, (some of them, I mean, though many others are undutiful, headstrong, and rebellious) I say, the better sort of Children obey their Parents, are unwilling to offend them, or incur their displeasure; but yet 'tis
not

not the command of God that sways them, or prevails with them. 'Tis because they stand in some awe of their Parents, but not because they stand in awe of God, who hath threatned to punish stubborn and disobedient Children, and hath promised to reward such of them as are dutiful, tractable and obedient, as is implied in the Motive annexed to the Fifth Commandment. 'Tis because of their dependance on them, and in regard they live in expectation of further kindnesse from them; but not with respect to God's command, who hath said, *Honour thy father and thy mother*; and, *Children obey your parents, for this is well-pleasing unto God.* Alas! This consideration, that 'tis well-pleasing unto God, hath not the least influence upon that obedience which many Children yield unto their Parents, nor are they at all moved or stirred up to the performance of their Duty to them thereby.

And so I have shewed in these few instances, unto which many more might be added, that though men may do many good things, yet very little of what they do, may upon examination appear to have been done faithfully; so far are they from being capable of the Testimony and Commendation given to *Quirinus*, to whom the Apostle saith, *Thou dost faithfully whatsoever thou dost; both to the brethren, and to strangers.*

All that I shall further add by way of Application, shall be to shew, how this faithfulness may be known, and how it may be

be attained. A man may know himself to be faithful;

and if he be universal in his duty, to

1. If he be universally Conscientious, if

he make Conscience of one thing as well as

of another. Faithfulness will cause a man

to have respect to his whole Duty, to all God's

Commandments. If any known Duty be

willingly and constantly neglected, 'tis a

shrewd Argument, that little else is done

faithfully; or at least so faithfully, as it

ought to have been done. For those Princi-

ples which would engage a man to faithfulness

in one thing, would also do it in all o-

ther things. *He that is faithful in that which is*

least, is faithful also in much; and he that is unjust

in the least, is unjust also in much. Upon this

ground it is that St. James saith, *Whoever*

shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point,

is guilty of all. The reason whereof he adds

in the next Verse; because the same Authority

of God is despised and violated in the

breach of any one Law, which should pre-

vail with us to yield obedience to all. And

he, who cares so little for God's Authority,

as that notwithstanding it he is bold to ven-

ture on Sin in one thing, would do it in other

things if there were the like opportunity

and temptation offered. Wherefore God,

who sees the inward frame of his heart, and

how it stands affected, looks upon him as

guilty of the breach of the whole Law in ef-

fect. *wod . wadh or ed Harb . wadh or ed*

yam ti wod bne . ywond ed yam . yam ti wod

or

2. If

Luke 16.
10.

Jam. 2. 10.

2. If you have a sight of your unfaithfulness; and if moreover you heartily bewail it, and sincerely mourn over it; if you discern how apt you are to have bye and low ends, to have base and unworthy ends in your best actions; to have your Eyes on man more than on God; to seek your Self, your own Advantage, Credit, Reputation, more than your Master's Honour; and furthermore, if these things be also grievous and burthensome to you; if you be humbled for them, if you hate them, if you constantly pray against them, vigorously oppose them, and strive against them; if it be thus with you, 'tis hence manifest that you would be faithful, and consequently that God mercifully looks upon you as faithful, in some good measure through his Son, and will for his sake accordingly treat you, and deal with you. But 'tis much to be feared, that there is little or no faithfulness, where there is no discerning of a man's unfaithfulness; no bewailing it, or striving against it. As 'tis a sign that there is little or no Faith, where there is not a sight and a sense of the weakness of a man's Faith, and of his Unbelief; and consequently where there is no bewailing it, no striving against it; where there are no serious endeavours to subdue the remainders of a man's unbelief, and to strengthen his Faith.

3. You may warrantably conclude, that you are, in some measure, faithful unto God in managing the Services and Employments
in

in which his Providence engageth you; if, when you have done your Duty in some weak measure as you are able, nothing else can satisfy you, but God's acceptance of your ministration. Is acceptance with men, good repute, commendation and applause from the World, nothing to you, unless God be pleased to discover his acceptance of you? Are you restless and unsatisfied, unless he be pleased some way or other to let you know that he is well-pleased with what you have done? And doth his acceptance quiet your mind, and satisfy your soul, whatever men judge of you, yea, though all the world should dislike and censure your actions? This is a great Argument, and a solid ground of satisfaction to you, that your aim was to please God, and to approve your self to him; that you did what you did sincerely and faithfully as unto him, and not unto men. But if mens acceptance of you, if their good thoughts of you, and good words do satisfy you, and you look no further; if having this, you are quiet, and at rest; you have great cause to suspect your self, or rather to conclude against your self, that you have what you aimed at, and that your main design was to please men rather than God. Had your eye been upon God, and had your chief aim and desire been to please him, and to be accepted of him, nothing else besides his acceptance would have satisfied you.

Now if you ask how you may attain to do every thing faithfully? I answer,

1. You

1. You must remember God's Presence and Omniscience. That Servant will think it concerns him to be faithful, who knows his Master's eye is upon him, and that he narrowly looks after him, and observes how he carries himself in the Services in which he is employed. How much more would the consideration of God's Eye make us faithful? for he sees not as man sees, he looks upon the Heart, observes not only what is done, but how 'tis done; what the desire, intent, and design of the heart is in every thing that is done. Yea, the inward disposition and frame of the heart in all our actions, is that which, above all things, he looks after and observes. Now he that shall believe, remember, and seriously mind this, how can he chuse but do his best endeavour to do every thing faithfully as in his sight, who *searcheth the heart, and tries the reins?*

2. Watch your hearts in all things which you set about, take in hand, or apply your self unto; and observe the inward Principles, Motives and Ends of all your Actions. Though you know the things which you do to be lawful, and to be, perhaps, not only lawful, but your Duty; and though there be in you general Intentions and Resolutions to do every thing faithfully; yet such is the corruption of your heart, that you will find it often interposeth and mingleth it self with your best actions, vitiating and depraving them, by putting you upon them from undue Motives, and to base and unworthy ends. Wherefore

fore, besides your general Resolutions to endeavour in all things to act faithfully, it will be of great concernment to you, that you often put the question to your Soul, and ask, or interrogate your self, saying, Why do I, or say I, this or that? What is it which at this time moves me thereunto? What's my present end or design therein? If we frequently thus reflect on our selves, and examine the Principles of our words and actions, as we should thereby often discover the falseness of our hearts, and our unfaithfulness in what we do; so it would be a great means to make us faithful, and to keep us that we act not from those undue and sinister motives, and to those bye and unworthy ends, which too often prevail in us, and have too great an influence upon our Actions.

3. Remember always and consider, that 'tis your great interest to do every thing faithfully, because otherwise all that which you do is lost, and your labour is laid out to no purpose; for you can neither look for acceptance nor reward thereof, nor comfort therein.

1. You can never expect acceptance with God. When you never aimed at pleasing him, nor looked after acceptance with him, how should you be accepted? Can those your actions please him, which were never done with any such intent, to the undertaking whereof you were wholly swayed by other Considerations, and which you would never have

have set your self about, had not other Motives induced you thereunto?

2. Much less can you expect any reward at the hands of God, of what is not done faithfully. Why should God reward you for that service, which was not intended to be done for him, but for your self, or for some other Master? For that service in which his glory was not aimed at, but your own reputation and advantage, or your worldly interest one way or other? When the Scribes and Pharisees were vain-glorious and hypocritical in their Duties; Praying, and giving Alms only to be seen of men, Christ said of them, *They have their reward.* They sought Mat. 6. 2. only praise and commendation from men; and they have what they sought after. Men applaud them, and speak well of them, and that's all the reward they must look for. As for God, they must expect no reward from him, whom they never intended to please or honour by their services.

3. Neither can they have any sound comfort in what is not done faithfully. If the most excellent and glorious services, and which are most highly esteemed, valued and magnified by men, should be so done, as God would neither accept nor reward them, what true comfort could any man have in them? If God frown upon a man, what good will the smiles of all the World do him? *In his favour*, and gracious acceptance, *is life*; but his frowns and displeasure

Psal. 76. 7. sure are as death. *Who may stand in his fight when once he is angry?* Happy is the man whose constant study and endeavour it is in all things so to order his Conversation, as to please him, whoever be thereby displeased.

The

The Eighth Sermon.

PROV. XXII. 1.

*The rich and the poor meet together ;
the Lord is the maker of them all.*

THESE words, as we see, contain two Propositions; the former of which is,
That the rich and the poor meet together:
The latter,

That the Lord is the maker of them all.

Both these Propositions may be understood several ways; I shall speak of them in order; and first of the former Proposition,

The rich and the poor meet together.

Which words are capable of many Interpretations, and 'tis not easy to judge which of them *Solomon* chiefly intended. 'Tis possible that he might purposely express himself in such terms, as that we might not be able to restrain the words to any one sense, excluding all other Interpretations. In such Scriptures where divers Expositions carry equal probability, so that we know not well which to embrace, or which to reject, the

safest way for the most part is to take in all those senses which the words will naturally and fairly admit of; so among them all we shall be sure to have that which was aimed at. As to our present business, The rich and the poor may be said to meet together,

1. In respect of the common nature of Mankind in which they agree, whatsoever other difference there may be between them.

As for their Bodies, there is the same rare composure and admirable artifice in both, the same infinite Wisdom, Power and Goodness of God discovered in framing the Bodies of the one, as of the other; there is not a Limb, nor a Joint, nor a Bone, nor a Sinew, nor a Vein, nor an Artery, nor a Muscle, nor a Nerve, nor a Gristle, nor the least string or little instrument of vital or animal operation or motions, but is alike to be found in the one as in the other, and all alike exquisitely framed and fitted for the respective uses and services in the Body. In a word; The Body of the Poor man is in all respects as wonderfully made, as that of the Rich.

Then as to their better part, the Spirit, the poor man is endowed with as excellent a Soul as the rich man. Hath the rich man a Soul endowed with the admired faculties of reason, and liberty of will? so hath the poor man. Have the rich an immortal Soul that shall

shall have a Being to eternity? so have the poor. Hath the rich man the Image of God stamp'd upon his Soul? so hath the poor. Doth the Soul of the one owe its original immediately and solely to God? and so doth the Soul of the other. Is God the Father of the Spirits of the rich? so is he of the Spirits of the poor. Is the Soul of the rich capable of unspeakable and endless happiness in the immediate vision and fruition of God, *in whose presence is the fulness of joy, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore?* so is the Soul of the poorest, every way as capable thereof.

2. The rich and the poor meet together in respect of the mutual dependance they have upon each other, and the need the one hath of the other. As the poor man cannot live without the rich man, so neither can the rich live without the poor. The poor cannot live without the charity and assistance of the rich, and the rich cannot live without the Service of the poor. How many poor mens Service is necessary towards the making of the rich man's Cloathing, and the furnishing of his Table! Doth he wear one Suit of Apparell, or make one Meal, unto which the labour of the poor man's hands doth not some way or other contribute, either immediately, or mediately and more remotely? *The king himself is served by the field.* And how many poor mens labour doth the Field require in manuring, and plowing, and harrowing, and sowing, and fencing, and weeding, and reaping, and

Ecclef. 5.

9.

and inning the Fruits of the Earth! And yet after that all this is done, the Corn that is thus housed, is not presently without any more ado made food; there must be threshing and winnowing, and grinding, and baking, in which the service of many poor mens hands is necessary, before the King himself can eat a bit of Bread. And as for the Pride and Luxury of many rich men, it were endless to reckon up how many poor mens hands in several ways of employment are made use of to supply and furnish them with materials by which these their Vices are fed and maintained.

3. The rich and the poor meet together in respect of their joint abode, neighbourhood, and cohabitation here in this World. There is no place where they are not both to be found. In all places where men live together for the mutual help and defence of one another, God's wise Providence hath mingled the rich and the poor together. Shew me a rich man's stately and well-furnished House, and I shall not need to go far to shew you a poor man's Cottage: and so on the contrary. And indeed 'tis needful it should so be, for as I have just now shewed, neither of them could be without the other.

4. The rich and the poor meet together in respect of the care and good Providence of God, that is alike extended to both. They are both under the same gracious Providence that looks after, provides for, preserves, safeguards and protects them both, though in
ways

ways somewhat different. The rich cannot say that God only regards them, and fixeth the eye of his Providence on them alone; neither can the poor complain that God disregards or neglects them. *The Lord is good to all, his mercy is over all his works.* And so far is he from having denied the poor the benefit of his gracious Providence, that in consideration of their destitute, disconsolate, and helpless condition, he hath many ways expressed his particular and tender care of them above others, as may elsewhere be shewed. Many Laws he hath made in behalf of them, many promises he hath made to them; he hath laid many charges on the rich to be helpful to them, and made many promises also to encourage them thereunto.

Psal. 145.
9.

5. The rich and the poor meet together in the same possibility and capacity of exchanging Conditions with one another. As the rich is capable of becoming poor, so the poor is capable of being made rich. The high Possessor of Heaven and Earth dispenseth outward things as he sees good, and to whom he pleaseth. He can fill the hand of the poor, and empty the hand of the rich, whensoever he will: He can reduce the rich to such a condition, as that the same hand that was wont to give relief, shall receive it; and he can advance the poor to such a condition, as that the same hand which received relief, shall give it. Such strange turns of God's Providence we often see. God, according to his good pleasure *lifteth up one, and setteth down another.*

up another, Psal. 75. 7. *He raiseth the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the needy out of the dung-hill; that he may set him with princes, even the princes of his people,* Psal. 113. 7, 8. And he maketh those that were brought up in scarlet, to embrace dung-hills, Lam. 4. 5.

And this leads me to the second Proposition,

The Lord is the maker of them all.

Which, when I shall also have spoken unto, I shall then make application of both together.

This latter Proposition may also be diversly understood. The rich and the poor may be considered, either as men, or as distinguished from one another by the different adjuncts of Riches and Poverty. Now take them under which of these two Considerations you please, *the Lord is the maker of them both,*

1. If you consider them both as men, so God is the maker of them all. And this, whether we look back to the first origine of Mankind, or whether we consider them as taking their beginning from their more immediate Parents.

If we look unto the Rock whence we were all hewen, and to the Pit whence we were digged; if we look back to our first Parents, *Adam and Eve*, in them we all came out of the hands of God by creation; he framed the first Man out of the dust of the Earth, and the first Woman out of the Rib
of

of Man, and breathed into them the breath of life, endued them both with an immortal Soul. In this Divine Original, in the honour of this miraculous beginning, the poor man hath an equal interest with the rich man; the rich cannot claim nearer kindred to *Adam* and *Eve*, than the poor; the poor can call *Adam* Grandfather, and *Eve* Grandmother, by as good right as the rich.

Again, if we consider them with relation to their more immediate Parents, as they derive their beginning from them, setting aside for the present the external and accidental considerations of Riches and Poverty, Honour and Dishonour, and the like, which will come to be spoken of afterwards; so God is the maker of them both; neither hath the Rich and Noble, considered merely as a Man, any pre-eminence in his Birth above the poor and ignoble. They both are alike

fearfully made, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth, that is, in their Mother's

Womb: In God's book were all the members of them both written; which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.

And when the Body was by the concurrence of admirable Wisdom and Power fitted to receive and entertain the Soul, and made a meet Receptacle and Instrument for so excellent a Being, God infused the Soul into the Body, by his immediate Almighty Power, giving it a being out of nothing, and in a wonderful manner, far transcending our apprehension, united the one to the other.

And

Psal. 139.
14, 15, 16.

And all this expence of Wisdom and Power he equally bestows upon the Rich and the Poor. And then they both endure the same confinement and imprisonment in the Womb; the Infant of the Rich and Noble hath no more room there, nor is it sooner at liberty than the Infant of the Beggar. And so at the length the same Wisdom, Power, and Goodness sends them both alike into the World; the Infant of the meanest, the lowest, doth not put the Mother to more pains in the birth, than the Infant of the highest, it may be to a great deal less. And how different soever their entertainment is when they are come into the World, yet God sends them both into it alike; the Infant of the Prince, that sits upon the Throne, is as naked and shiftless as the Infant of the poorest that embraceth Dunghills. And thus we have seen, that God is the maker of them both, considered as men; and that as such, God makes the rich and the poor alike, putting no difference between them, nor being at any greater expence of Wisdom and Power in making of the one, than he is in making of the other.

2. If the rich and the poor be considered as they are distinguished by these adjuncts of Riches and Poverty, so likewise God is the maker of them both. 'Tis God's Providence that puts these external Differences between men. *The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich; he bringeth low, and lifteth up, as Hannah sings.* 'Tis neither by chance, nor by man's skill

1 Sam. 2. 7.

or industry alone, that men become rich, but by the blessing of God upon skill and industry, and his over-ruling Providence, that gives out, and distributes these things by no other rule than *the good pleasure of him, who worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will*, Eph. 1. 11. *The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; neither yet bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favour to men of skill*, Eccles. 9. 11. *It is God that giveth men power to get wealth*, Deut. 8. 18.

This we see by experience. Men of great skill and abilities, that understand the World, and know how to manage their Affairs to the best advantage; that lay many wise Plots, and have many ingenious Designs for raising themselves, and advancing their Estates; that by their wit and fore-cast put themselves into many very probable ways of attaining Riches; yet they do but labour in the fire, lay out their wit, and spend their strength for nought. All their Projects and Contrivances are but as the Spider's Web, finely and curiously spun indeed, and drawn out of the very bowels of the Creature; but instantly broken to pieces, and swept away with one little brush of the Besom. If God do but blow upon mens wisest Counsels for advantaging themselves, they are presently blasted, they wither, fade away, and come to nothing. And so we may observe on the other side, That men of far weaker parts, less skill, less fore-cast and contrivance, less ability for managing their Affairs, yet many times, through
the

The Eighth Sermon.

the blessing of God, who giveth power to get Wealth, attain unto great Estates. In these, as in all other things, God's blessing and over-ruling Providence are all in all. The *Psalmist* discoursing of the inconstancy and instability of all earthly things, cries out, *Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie: To be laid in the ballance, they are altogether lighter than vanity.* And hereupon he counsels men not to rely on any of these things, nor to suffer their Affections to be fastened to them; *If riches increase, set not your heart upon them:* And then presently he adds in the next Verse, *God hath spoken once, twice have I heard this, That power belongeth to God.* As if he had said, 'Tis a Divine Oracle worthy to be believed, which I have heard from the mouth of God more than once, *That power belongeth to God;* 'tis in the hand of his Providence to dispose of these things, to give them, and take them away again at pleasure; and therefore he, and he only is to be trusted in, and relied on. And as for Riches, so again for Poverty, 'tis an effect of God's Providence also, though many times as a just punishment of mens wastfulness, prodigality, unthriftiness, idleness, and many other sins. But many there are, who though they be industrious and unblameable, yet the most wise Providence of God keeps them low still; and whensoever they begin to get something about them, and to put up their heads a little, God provides somewhat to pull them down again, that meaner Condition being

Psal. 62. 9,
10.

that

that which his Wisdom judgeth to be meet-
est for them. We use to say, Some are born
to be poor. There is somewhat of truth in
it, if we understand it aright. As God hath,
as it were, destined and ordained some to be
rich, so he hath destined some to poverty.
Poor they are, and poor they shall be; do they
what they can to shake off their poverty, they
shall never be rid of it. Neither yet ought
any man to be offended at this dispensation
of God; much less to charge God foolishly,
as if he had not done herein what is best.
Foolish man may be apt to think how much
better it had been if God had made all men
rich, and Poverty had been a thing which
the World never knew. But let no man op-
pose his own foolishness to God's Wisdom.
*Who hath been his counsellor? Rom. 11. 34. Shall
my teach God knowledge? Job 21. 22.* It be-
comes us, weak, blind, and shallow Crea-
tures that we are, evermore to think well
of what God doth, whether we can discern
the grounds and reasons of his Providence or
no; and to have a holy veneration even for
those his Works, the causes whereof we do not
understand, nor are able to give an account
of. But as to the matter in hand, though
perhaps it may not be needful nor expedient
that we should know all the reasons which
God had for putting such a difference between
men, making some of them to be rich, and
others poor; yet some imperfect account of
some of the reasons of this Dispensation we
can give. That God doth no man any wrong
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in with-holding the things of this World from him, while he is pleased to load others with his benefits, giving them as much as heart can wish, will be readily granted by all who acknowledge God's Sovereignty, and allow him to have a rightful power to do as he pleaseth with his own. Besides, who can challenge any thing, a crumb of Bread, or a drop of Water at the hands of God? He that hath least, must he not confess that he hath more than he hath deserved? *Who hath first given unto him?* saith the Apostle, *Rom. II. 35. In him we live, and move, and have our being:* And seeing he hath given us our being, and all our Powers and Abilities, we can render nothing to him in way of service, or otherwise, but what we have received from him. Can we deserve any thing at his hands by rendring him that which was his own before, that which we owed him? Again, besides all this, we have all, by our manifold sins, and continual provocations, deserved to be deprived of whatever Mercy we enjoy. We should long ago have been turned into Hell, if we had had our due, and been dealt with according to our sins: And how much more then have we deserved to be stripped of all our Comforts? Be it never so little and so mean that you have, you had not now had it, if God had been extream to mark what you had done amiss. It had been all gone, it had been snatcht away from you in displeasure, if God's patience and long-sufferance had not stood you in more stead than any deserts of your own.

Well

Well then, this I take for granted, that he who is in the poorest, the most destitute, the most forlorn, the most desolate and despicable condition among you all, is convinced that God hath done him no wrong, nor can do any man wrong, by denying him that which he is not bound to give him.

Now moreover, that God in putting such a difference between men, is not only just, but most wise and good, may appear to any man that shall duly consider this dispensation.

1. 'Tis for the Order and Beauty of the Universe, that there should be variety in the World; and interchangeable Vicissitudes of things; Winter and Summer, Spring and Autumn, Sickness and Health, Prosperity and Adversity, Light and Darkness, do all contribute, though in several ways to adorn and beautify the Creation, and set forth the Power, Wisdom, and Goodness of the Creator. And even those things which in some mens eyes may seem to be the spots and blemishes of the Creation, (for so men of profane spirits may be too prone to judge of them) do as well contribute to the beauty and lustre of the whole, as those things that are of eminent beauty and perfection. Even Monsters serve to set forth and commend the Wisdom and Goodness of God, in the exact frame, due lineaments, right proportions and features, strength and beauty of perfect Creatures. So the poor, strait and indigent condition

dition of some, so much the more commends the Bounty and Goodness of God to others; and provokes them, at least should provoke them to so much the greater love and thankfulness to that God who hath been so bountiful to them, and hath been pleased to put such a difference between them and others; and this albeit they have deserved at the hands of God, no more than those their inferiors who are in the most necessitous condition.

2. This difference which God hath put between men, affords the Rich opportunities of exercising their Charity, Pity, and Compassion towards the Poor, and gives the Poor occasion of exercising their Faith and Trust in God for supplies of Necessaries; Patience, Humility, Contentment with their mean condition, quiet submission to the good pleasure of God in thus dealing with them, and thankfulness to God for those helps and assistances which he is pleased to reach forth to them by the hands of those with whom he deposited more of the things of this World, on purpose that they might be helpful to those who have less.

3. God hath been pleased to put this difference between men in regard of the necessity there is of different Stations and Conditions, different Services and Employments for procuring and carrying on the good and welfare of the Community of Mankind. Some must govern, and others must be governed; or else we shall quickly be ruined, and all things will run into confusion. Some must labour in

in the Field, others must grinde at the Mill, others handle the Distaff; some must be imployed in meaner, other in higher Services, in order whereunto it was fit that men's conditions should be suited to those Employments in which they are to be serviceable to God and their Generation.

Now the Application of what hath been spoken, follows; and this will concern all. I shall first speak to the Rich, and then to the Poor. As for the Rich, or those whom God hath been pleased to intrust with a larger portion of Temporal things, they may hence be minded of their Duty several ways. If the Rich and the Poor meet together in all those respects before-mentioned, and God be the Maker of them all, both as men, and as considered under the different Adjuncts of Riches and Poverty; then may the Rich hence be cautioned and admonished,

1. Not to despise the Poor. This is that which men who even wallow in Plenty, and abound with the good things of this Life, are very subject to. A poor man is many times a contemptible thing in their eyes; and as he hath occasion to come near them, he scarce meets with those civilities from them that are due to Mankind. And usually none are more faulty this way, than such as have the greatest obligation to civility and condescension; I mean such as were not long since in a mean condition themselves, and
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have but newly been advanced to an higher Station. But these, and whosoever else may be blame-worthy in this respect, should consider what hath above been discoursed of.

(1.) That the poorest and most forlorn Creature who is most despicable in their eyes, hath as noble and excellent a Soul as they have themselves, or as the greatest Potentate in the World hath; and as for his very Body, though cloathed with nasty Rags, the exquisite Workmanship thereof is no less admirable than that of his that is cloathed with Scarlet, and adorned with Gold and Pearls, and whatever Nature or Art could contribute to make it beautiful and lovely.

Acts 10.
34.

(2.) That the poorest man in the World is as dear to God as they are, and as much under the Care and gracious Providence of God; for fine Cloaths, and Riches, and Honours, commend no man to God; high and low, rich and poor are alike to him; for he *is no respecter of persons*; neither doth he rate or value any man according to these things. 'Tis grace and holiness that he looks after, and accordingly proportions his esteem for men. *The Lord seeth not as man seeth; man looketh upon the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh upon the heart, 1 Sam. 16. 7. The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, Psal. 34. 15. The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy, Psal. 147. 11.* But as for wicked and ungodly men, of what rank or quality soever they may be in

in this World, the Lord hates and abhors them. Psal. 5. 5.

(3.) They should consider, that the poorest man in all the World is as capable of being admitted to the blissful Vision and Fruition of God in the World to come, is as capable of glory and eternal happiness, as the richest. As God hath given the same Rational and Immortal Soul to Rich and Poor, whereby they are both capable of the sight and enjoyment of God; so hath Christ died for both, and paid the same invaluable price for the Redemption of both; and so he hath commanded his Gospel to be published alike to both, and therein the same terms of Salvation to be indifferently propounded to the one and the other. There is not one Gospel for the Rich, and another for the Poor; nor are the terms of peace with God, and reconciliation to him, more easy and favourable for the one than for the other. The Gospel puts no difference between men with reference to those different circumstances as to outward things, under which they may be. It speaks the same Language to all; *Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature; He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned,* Mark 16. 15, 16. *Without holiness no man shall see the Lord,* Heb. 12. 14. *Except ye repent ye shall all perish,* Luk. 13. 3. *Except ye be converted ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven,* Mat. 18. 3.

Now if God values the Souls of Rich and Poor alike, hath taken the same care of, and made the same provision for the Salvation of both; if Rich and Poor meet together, stand both upon even ground, and are upon equal terms, as to the matters that are of highest importance and everlasting concernment to the one and the other; should any man despise his poor Brother upon the account of these temporal things, these poor and worthless trifles that signify as good as nothing?

2. The Rich may hence be cautioned, Not to count the Poor a grievance or heavy burthen to them; I mean the honest, sober, humble, modest and industrious Poor. As for wicked, loose, idle, and unprofitable Persons, whether they be Poor or Rich, they are not only a grievance, but the very Pests of the Places where they live, as exposing them to God's Wrath, and drawing down his Judgments upon themselves and others.

1. While you count the Poor a grievance, and think how much happier the World would be if all men were Rich as you are, you forget that the Rich stand in need of the Poor, and could not subsist without them. Though you had such a Mass of Treasure as you could wallow in Gold and Silver, yet these Metals could not clothe you; neither could you feed and live upon them; Gold and Silver would neither quench your thirst, nor satisfy your hunger. You are beholding to
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the labour of the Poor man's hands for your Raiment and your Diet, as I have shewed before.

2. 'Tis a great advantage that you have the Poor among you, and continually before your eyes, to make you the more thankful for that plenty that God hath blessed you withal (as hath also been said) *Who maketh thee to differ from another?* as the Apostle puts the question in another case. Why had not he that last craved a Bit of Bread at your Door, been the Rich man, and you the Beggar? Why had not he been in your room, and you in his? Why had not he been arrayed in your Silk and Purple, and you clad in his Rags? Can you look upon him, and reflect on your self without a deep sense of his most free and undeserved Bounty to you, who is the Maker of Rich and Poor, and of his own good pleasure alone hath put this difference between you and your Poor Neighbour? The advantage of this kindly Incentive and Spur to thankfulness, you owe to the Poverty of your Brother. Besides, as the beholding of his Poverty makes you more thankful for your abundance, so it helps you to relish your good things the better, and puts a sweetness into them which you would not have tasted, unless your Neighbours wants had been as sauce to your full Dishes to make them savoury to you. So you are beholding to him not only for your Meat, but for your Sauce also.

1 Cor 4 7.

3. The Poor that live among you, afford you a rich opportunity of laying out and employing that which God hath put into your hand to the best advantage. Were it not for the Poor, you would want an object on which to exercise your Charity and Compassions, and so you would lose much of your comfort here, and a great part of your reward hereafter. What comforts, what inward satisfactions and contents there are in doing good to the distressed, he only knows who hath with humility and sincerity much exercised himself that way. He who hath been much in that Duty, can upon his own experience subscribe to that of our Saviour, that 'tis a *more blessed thing to give than to receive*. But besides the present comforts that are to be enjoyed in the right performance of this Duty, there is moreover the reward hereafter, which God hath graciously promised, and will not fail to bestow. As a man soweth here, so shall he reap hereafter; *He that soweth bountifully, shall reap bountifully*. He shall be fully recompenced for whatsoever he hath done of this nature at the Resurrection of the just. And this so exactly and punctually, that not so much as a Cup of cold Water given to a Disciple in the name of a Disciple, shall be unrewarded.

Acts 20.
35.

2 Cor. 9. 6.

Luke 14.
14.

What other improvement of your Riches comparable with this, can you possibly make? Employ them how you will any other way for your Temporal Advantage, they will no longer

longer stand you in stead than while your abode shall be here; when Death comes, all is gone; you must then leave whatsoever you have laid together and heaped up; and you must go as naked out of this World as you came into it, excepting only your Winding-sheet and Coffin; that's all you can carry hence, and that also to moulder into dust together with your self. But now the Poor give you an opportunity of making that use of Riches that shall abound to your account another day, and so in effect you carry them along with you into the other World.

3. Seeing the Rich and the Poor meet together in so many respects; and seeing God is the Maker of them both; and seeing 'tis by his most wise and gracious Providence that there should be such different Ranks and Conditions of men, that some should be full, and others empty; some should abound, and others be in want; let the Rich be hence cautioned not to oppress the Poor.

(1.) This were a foul and wretched abuse of those Advantages in Power and Wealth, which God hath graciously afforded them above their Brethren.

(2.) This were horrid unthankfulness to God, who hath been pleased out of his free Goodness and Bounty to put such a difference between them and others.

(3.) This were directly contrary to the design of God, in bestowing upon one a larger

The Eighth Sermon.

Portion of these Temporals than another, which was, that he that hath much, might be helpful and beneficial to him that hath little, and not that he might thereby be the better enabled to keep under and crush his needy and distressed Brother. God hath made no man strong, that he might push at those that are weaker; nor hath he made any man Rich, that he might by his Wealth and Riches imperiously domineer over and trample on his Poor Neighbour. Neither may the Rich man be emboldened to oppress his poor Brother, because he is weak and unable to make resistance. The weaker he is, and the more unable to defend or right himself, the more unsafe it is to meddle with him: For God himself hath undertaken to stand by, and help those who have no power to help themselves. Take heed what you do in taking Advantage of the Poor man's weakness to injure and oppress him. Are you not aware, that while you abuse your Wealth and Power to the oppressing of your weak Brother, and think you may do as you list with him that hath no might to oppose you, or defend himself against you, you have to do with God, and enter the Lists with him, who hath said, *For the oppression of the poor, and for the sighing of the needy will I arise to set him in safety from him that puffereth at him, Psal. 12. 5. Who delivereth the poor from him that is too strong for him, yea the poor and needy from him that spoileth him, Psal. 35. 10.* If you love your self, and would consult your own peace and safety, meddle

meddle not with God, which certainly you do in oppressing your poor and impotent Brother. Take Solomon's Counsel, who saith, *Rob not the poor because he is poor, neither oppress the afflicted in the gate; for the Lord will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them,* Prov. 22. 22, 23.

Now the Poor may be oppressed many ways; I shall only at present give two instances thereof.

1. The Rich may oppress the Poor by denying them those helps which of right belong to them, or by diverting to other uses than that which was originally by the Bounty of Benefactors intended and designed for their relief. This were an horrible and crying Sin; this were no better than removing the old Land-mark, and entring into the Field of the Fatherless, which Solomon would have no man so hardy as to attempt, because *their Redeemer is mighty, and he will plead their cause.* You who have the disposing of the Poores-money, take heed you derive not upon you the guilt of this sin; a sin of that heinous nature, as that it were enough to set a whole Town on Fire, and turn it into Ashes; look to it therefore, and see that the Charity of Benefactors run in its own proper Channel.
2. The Poor may be oppressed by the Rich, in dealing rigorously and unmercifully with them, and using them hardly in those things
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Prov. 23.
10, 11.

The Eighth Sermon.

in which they make use of their labour. To enforce them to do their work upon such pitiful terms, as that all which they can get by their utmost diligence will hardly buy them Bread to keep them alive, while you raise your selves, and grow Rich upon their uncessant Labours, is certainly in God's account no better than Oppression, a sin which may justly bring the Curse of God upon your Estates. If there should be any here that are concerned, I would earnestly request them to consider seriously of it. If upon enquiry you should find you have been guilty of this kind of Oppression, you may well look upon it as one of those things for which God hath had a Controversy with you, and punished you, by snatching away from you what had been so heaped together. And let me further lay these things before you to be pondered.

1. To take advantage of poor Peoples Necessities, and make them part with their Work at any rate, because they must have Bread for themselves and theirs, or starve, is that measure which you would not should be made you, if you were in their Circumstances. Suppose your self to be in their condition, and they in yours; would you not then think it very hard measure to be so dealt with?

2. Though allowing them for their Labour so much as might make their Livelihood a little better, you would gain so much the less, yet you would have much more comfort
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in what is so gotten, were it never so little. 'Tis but an uncomfortable thing for any man to grow Rich by pinching the Poor.

3. You would be sure to have the Blessing of God, and not his Curse, upon what is so gotten, be it more or less. I beseech you let this be written upon the Table of your Heart, let it be deeply ingraven there as a certain Truth, and unquestionable Principle which can never fail you, That in the Conclusion you shall be never the poorer for using Poor people well; and you shall be never the Richer for having used them hardly.

Having hitherto spoken to the Rich, I come now to speak a few words to the Poor, who may also from what hath been said, be minded of their Duty several ways.

1. Do the Rich and Poor meet together, and do they both stand upon even ground, and are they upon equal terms, as in many other respects before mentioned, so more especially as to their highest Concernments? Are the Poor, the Lowest, the Meanest, and the most Contemptible amongst them, as much the Objects of God's Care, and of his gracious Providence, as the Rich; even as those among the Rich, the height and splendor of whose condition in the World have made them Objects of the Envy of all their Inferiors? Are the poorest, even such as are clothed in Rags, in as fair a way for Heaven, and as capable of Grace here, and Glory here.

hereafter, as the greatest Princes, as the most Illustrious and Renowned Potentates in the World? Then let the Poor hence learn, not to be discouraged, much less give way to murmuring and repining at the Providence of God, that has put such a difference between them and their Superiors, as to the things of this World. It has seemed good to the Wisdom of God to place them below, while others are seated above; to make their condition mean and despicable, while the conditions of others hath rendered them honourable, and even adorable in the eyes of the inferior World. But seeing the Poor and the Rich meet together, and are in equal condition as to the best, the most excellent, and the most desirable things; What good reason is there why they should not be well contented with their condition, and be most thankful unto God for it? What reason have they to justify their envying at the Rich and Honourable, seeing they themselves are no way inferior to them, and come no way short of them as to those things which are of greatest value, and of highest importance?

U S E 2.

Seeing the Poor are as capable of Heaven and Eternal Happiness in the World to come, as the Rich; Let them give all diligence to be duly qualified for it; let their constant and earnest endeavours be to labour after a meetness

meetness to be made *partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light*. Seeing God has put them in as fair a way for Heaven as any else, let them take heed that they fall not short of Heaven through their sloth and carelessness, and through their neglect of the great Salvation which God in the Gospel reveals, and as freely offers to them as he doth to the Rich, and which, if they be not wanting to themselves, they may be made partakers of upon the same terms on which the Rich are capable thereof; yea in some respects upon easier terms; forasmuch as the Riches, Honours, Preferments, and high Places of their Superiors so load, incumber and clog them, as they are thereby much retarded and hindered in their way to Heaven. Both conditions have their difficulties, both their advantages; both have the like end to respect, both have the like capacity of attaining it; herein they both meet together; but the happiness of all is, *That God is the maker and disposer of both.*

[The text in this section is extremely faint and illegible due to the age and condition of the document. It appears to be a continuous block of text, possibly a letter or a chapter section.]

The Ninth Sermon.

2 CHRON. 33. 10, 11, 12, 13.

And the Lord spake to Manasseh, and to his People: but they would not hearken. Wherefore the Lord brought upon them the Captains of the Host of the King of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the Thorns, and bound him with Fetters, and carried him to Babylon.

And when he was in Affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his Fathers, And prayed unto him, and he was intreated of him, and heard his Supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his Kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God.

IN this Chapter we have a brief History of the Reign of *Manasseh*, from the Beginning of the Chapter to the 20th Verse. This *Manasseh* was the Son of *Hezekiah*, a most wicked Son, though descending from a most pious and religious Father. I say, a most wicked

wicked Son, for such he was till God was pleased to humble him, and work a Change in him. He that shall read the Account that is here, and in 2 *Kings* 21. given of the former Part of his Reign, and compare it with the worst of all the Kings that went before him, shall find that in all manner of abominable Wickedness he exceeded them all: His Sins were of a most horrid Nature; Idolatry, Witchcraft, consulting with Wizards, and such as had familiar Spirits; his causing his own Son to be burnt in way of Sacrifice to his Idols; his barbarous Cruelty in shedding innocent Blood in that abundance, that he filled *Jerusalem* with it from one End to the other. Moreover, as these his Sins were heinous and abominable in their own Nature, so were the Aggravations of them such, as greater or higher could not easily be. These Aggravations hath the Spirit of God in the History mentioned, and in a special manner insisted on.

2 *Kings*
21. 3.
2 *Chron.*
33. 3.
2 *Kings*
21. 4.

Ver. 7.

1. That he wrought all this Wickedness, notwithstanding the good Example that his Father *Hezekiah* had given him, by his Zeal against Idolatry; *That he built up again the high Places which his Father had destroyed.*

2. *That he built Altars in the House of the Lord, of which the Lord had said, In Jerusalem will I put my Name. That he set a graven Image of the Grove that he had made in the House which God hath chosen to place his Name therein for ever. It had been an horrible Sin, if he had*

had only built his Altars, and set his Images any where else; how much more to set them up in the House of God, the Place which God made such account of, and so highly esteemed; that he should set up his Idols in that Place, as it were in Defiance of God, and of his Worship there?

3. That he should not content himself to have offered other Sacrifices to his Idols, unless he had also offered his own Son in Sacrifice, and caused him to pass through the Fire.

4. That he did worse than those Nations which God destroyed, and cast out before them for their Sins; that the fearful Examples of God's Severity against them should not deter him from committing the same and greater Abominations.

If you demand how this could be; how it was possible that *Manasseh* should do worse than those Heathen Nations that were cast out and destroyed for their Sins?

I answer;

(1.) *Manasseh* and his People had those Means of Grace which those Heathen Nations never enjoyed. *Manasseh* and his People sinned against that Light which was never vouchsafed the *Amorites*; and this did not a little heighten their Sins.

(2.) *Manasseh* erected more Images and Idols than the *Amorites* had. The several Nations in *Canaan* generally kept themselves to those particular gods which they

called their own; but *Manasseh* multiplied his Idols.

(3.) Those Nations were not wont to change their supposed gods, but strictly adhered to them. Thus did not *Manasseh* and his People; and in this Respect their Idolatry was worse than that of the Heathen, as God by the Prophet *Jeremiah* sets it forth, and aggravates it; *Have a Nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? But my People have changed their glory for that which doth not profit.* The gods of those Heathenish Nations were no gods, and yet those Nations would not cast them off, and take up other gods; they stuck and adhered to them stedfastly and resolutely, and would not exchange them for the true God: but *Manasseh* and his People forsook the only true and living God that made the Heavens, and betook themselves to the Worship and Service of false gods; they changed their Glory (for such was the true God to them, while they owned him alone, and cleaved to him) they changed their Glory for them that were no gods, but the Work of Mens Hands. In these Respects *Manasseh* did worse than the Heathen.

5. Another Aggravation of his Sin was, that whereas the shedding the Blood of one innocent Person had been a crying Sin, he shed it at such a rate, that he filled *Jerusalem* with innocent Blood from one End to the other; there was no part of that great City where the Blood of innocent Persons
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that had been causlessly spilt, was not to be seen, and where the Cry of it might not be heard: So great and so hainous were this Man's Sins, and so high were the Aggravations of them.

Now in the Words which I have read, we are informed how God was pleased to deal with him ; what Courses he took to reclaim him and his People ; and what was the Effect thereof upon him and them. This in the General.

More particularly in the Words following.

In the Words we have,

1st. God's great Mercy to him and his People, in calling them to Repentance, and in giving them warning of approaching Judgments in case they should still persevere in their Sins and Impenitency. The Lord spake unto *Manasseh* and to his People, as 'tis here briefly express'd, but more fully in 2 Kings 21. 10, 11, 12, 13. *The Lord spake by his Servants the Prophets, saying, Because Manasseh King of Judah hath done these Abominations, and hath done wickedly above all that the Amorites did which were before him, and had made Judah also to sin with his Idols: Therefore thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Behold, I am bringing such Evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever heareth of it, both his ears shall tingle. And I will stretch over Jerusalem the Line of Samaria, and the Plummets of the House of Ahab; and I will wipe Jerusalem, as a Man*

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wipeth a Dish, wiping it, and turning it upside down.

2dly. We have the Obstinacy and Impenitency of *Manasseh* and his People; they would not hearken.

3dly. We have an Account of that further Course which God took with *Manasseh*, in order to his reclaiming, when gracious Calls and Invitations to Repentance, and Warnings of approaching Judgments, would not prevail: *The Lord brought upon them the Captains of the Host of the King of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the Thorns, and bound him with Fetters, and carried him to Babylon.*

4thly. We have an Account of the Effect which this severe Course had upon *Manasseh*: When he was in Affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his Fathers, and prayed unto him.

5thly. We have the Issue of his humbling himself, seeking God, and praying to him: God was intreated of him, and heard his Supplication, and brought him again to *Jerusalem* into his Kingdom.

6thly. We are informed what *Manasseh* gained, or what he learned by all this; *Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God.*

To speak of these Particulars in order.

1. We have in the Words God's great Mercy to *Manasseh* and his People, in calling them to Repentance, and giving them Warning
of

of approaching Judgments, in case they should still persist obstinately and impenitently in their sinful Courses. This gracious and merciful Dealing of God with *Manasseh* and his People, may afford us two Observations.

I. *That God is graciously pleased to call and invite Sinners to Repentance, and to give them Warnings of the Judgments that are hanging over their Heads, before he brings his Judgments upon them.* This is the usual Course of God's Providence; he is not wont to surprize men with his Judgments before he gives them any notice of the Danger they are in; but he first warns them, calls them to Repentance, and threatens them if they shall still continue in their Impenitency; and when all his Warnings are slighted, then he strikes. Thus he warned the old world, and called them to Repentance by the Preaching of *Noah*, all the while the Ark was a building. Thus by the Prophets he called the Jews to Repentance, and threatned them with the Captivity, if they repented not. Thus Christ himself called them to Repentance; and in case of their Impenitency still persisted in, threatned the utter Desolation and Destruction of the Temple and City of *Jerusalem* by the *Romans*.

Now the Reasons why God is pleased thus to deal with Sinners; why he thus calls them to Repentance, and gives them warning before he strikes, are principally these two.

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1st. That by their timely Repentance and Reformation they may prevent his Judgments; and that he may have no Occasion of using that Severity against them, which if they repent not, will be necessary both for the Vindication of his Honour, and in order to their Humiliation and Reformation: *God doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the Children of Men.* He takes no Delight in severe Courses, unless where there is a Necessity of them, in regard that gentler Means do no Good.

2^{dly}. He gives Warning, calls to Repentance, and promises Mercy upon Repentance, before he strikes; to the End, that if Men will take no Warning, if sin they will, and persevere still in their Sins, whatever it costs them, the Justice of his Proceedings against them may be cleared, that the Sinners themselves may be rendred inexcusable, and every Mouth may be stopped, or be enforced to acknowledge that he is righteous, even when he punisheth them most severely.

Use 1. If God be so gracious as to call to Repentance, and give Warnings before he strikes; Let us not be unconcerned at such Warnings, let us not slight them or contemn them; neither let our Hearts fret or rise against them, but humbly, patiently, and thankfully entertain them, and carefully improve them. If God's Design in them be to prevent Punishments, let not us by our slighting and disregarding them, draw those Evils upon

upon our selves which they are designed to keep off. 'Tis a dangerous thing not to take Warning when 'tis given us, when God gives it that he may bring us to Repentance by it. The Admonition that *Ely* gave his Sons, and the Representation that he made to them of the Danger of their sinful Practices, was in effect a Warning from God: but they regarded it not; and what was the Issue but their Ruine? The Spirit of God saith, *They bearkned not to the Voice of their Father, because the Lord would slay them. God shall wound the Head of his Enemies, and the hairy Scalp of every one that goeth on still in his Trespases.* And the making good of this Threatning may They above others expect, that still go on in their Trespases against Warnings; and especially if they still go on against many Warnings. *He that being often reprov'd hardeneth his Neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without Remedy.* Do we believe this? If we do, how should we hasten to make our Peace with God; especially such of us as have long gone on in our Sins against all Warnings and Calls to Repentance? We may think perhaps that because we have been long warned and threatened, and yet still God holds his Hand, and forbears to strike, we are in no Danger; it may be the long Patience which God hath exercised towards us, makes us regardless of his Warnings: and now at length we begin to make account that we may safely enough go on in our old Ways, there is no such Danger as hath been pretended. But let us take heed

1 Sam. 2.

25.

Psal. 68.

21.

Prov. 29.1.

how we thus abuse the Patience and Long-sufferance of God. Whatever our present Thoughts are, or how much soever we may now flatter our selves, these two things we shall certainly find in the end.

Mat. 24.
35.

1. That how long soever God may bear with us, yet he will fulfil his Threatnings in the end, unless by our Repentance we prevent them. Heaven and Earth shall rather pass away, than any one Word that he hath spoken shall fall to the Ground.

Psal. 50.
21, 22.

2. The longer God is pleased to bear with us, and wait for our Repentance, the more severely will he handle us at last, if still we refuse to be reclaimed. Long-continued and abused Patience usually ends in Fury. *I kept silence*, said God to the wicked Man, the obstinate Sinner that would not be reclaimed; *I had long Patience with him: and thou thoughtest that I was such a one as thy self;* My Forbearance of thee made thee think that I was much of thy mind, and had no great dislike of thy evil Ways: *But I will reprove thee, and set thy Sins in order before thee. Consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver you.* As if he had said, Though I have born long with thee, yet thou art much mistaken if thou thinkest that I will always bear with thee: The longer I stay, the more terrible and irresistible will my Judgments be when I reckon with thee, and come upon thee at last.

Use 2. If God be pleased to call Sinners to Repentance, and to give them Warning before he punishes them; then let all such as are punished, justify God, and acknowledge that they suffer justly, and that they have no reason to complain of God, but of themselves: For having offended, and deserved Punishment, God gave them Warning before he would correct them; but they would not take Warning. If they be punished, they may thank themselves; they might by their Repentance have prevented it, but they would not.

Use 3. The same Consideration should also perswade Sufferers to bear with Patience what God is pleased to lay upon them for their Sins. They have wilfully made themselves Sufferers, and drawn those Evils upon themselves, which God would never have inflicted on them, if any Warnings would have made them sensible of their Danger, and have reclaimed them, if any Calls and Invitations to Repentance, and Offers of Mercy would have prevailed with them, taken them off from their sinful Courses, and gained them. Is there not all the reason in the World, that they should undergo with Patience those Evils which they would bring upon themselves, notwithstanding all the Means which God made use of to keep them off? *Thou hast consulted Shame to thy House, said God to the King of Babylon.* When impenitent Sinners will

Hab. 2. 10.

Jer. 4. 18.

will take no Warnings, when they will not be perswaded to take that Course by which alone Punishments may be prevented, they consult Punishments to themselves. Whatever a Man suffers, he may say to himself as God said to his People, *Thy way and thy doings have procured these things unto thee.* He that shall consider this, cannot but acknowledge that his Impatience under God's afflicting Hand is most unreasonable.

II. Another Observation from God's speaking to *Manasseh* and his People, from his forewarning them of approaching Judgments, and calling them to Repentance, is, *That God is pleased to give warning to the greatest Sinners before he punisheth them, and to call them to Repentance, that they may use the Means for escaping those his Judgments, which without Repentance will inevitably overtake them, and come upon them.* Such a Sinner was *Manasseh*, whose monstrous Wickedness and horrid Abominations we have in part been acquainted with before. And as for his People, we may well suppose that they also were prodigiously wicked, and ripe for the Sickle, for the Sickle of the Wrath of God, seeing many of them must needs concur with *Manasseh* in those his Sins, and were together with him jointly threatened with those terrible Judgments that are mentioned, *2 Kings 21.* So then both *Manasseh* and his People had arrived at a fearful pitch of Wickedness: and yet as wicked as they were, God gives them fair Quarter; he

he warns them before he will pour out the Vials of his Wrath upon them; and calls them to Repentance, that they might not say when his Judgments should take hold of them, that they would have repented if they had known the Danger they were in, and sufficient Warning had been given them in season. The Age before the Flood was desperately wicked, inasmuch that it's said, *It repented the Lord that he had made Man on the Earth, and that it grieved him at the Heart*: So is God pleased to let forth the Wickedness of Mankind in those Times, speaking after the manner of Men. So again 'tis afterwards said, *that all Flesh had corrupted his Way upon the Earth, and that the Earth was filled with Violence*. And yet tho Mankind had so wofully degenerated, and the World was so fearfully corrupted, and so universally depraved, that only eight Persons, Noah and his Family, were preserved; yet God did not presently sweep them all away with the Besom of Destruction, but gave them warning of the Flood 120 Years before it came, and waited for their Repentance all the while that the Ark was a preparing. The Jews were desperately wicked before the Captivity, as by the Descriptions of their grievous Sins, and universal Corruption, which we meet with in the Prophets, may be seen; and yet God did not immediately call for their Enemies to fall upon them, and carry them away Captives, but raised up and sent them many Prophets to forewarn them of the Captivity, and call upon them for

Humi-

Gen. 6. 6.

Ver. 12,
13.

Ver. 3.

1 Pet. 3.
20.

Humiliation and Reformation, that the Miseries threatened might not come upon them.

Jonah 1.2. The Wickedness of the *Ninivites* was great, and came up before God; and yet God would not presently destroy them, but gave them Warning by the Prophet *Jonah*, sent to them on purpose, who cried and solemnly proclaimed in the City, saying, *Yet forty Days and Niniveh shall be overthrown.* How extremely wicked and universally corrupt the Jewish State was immediately before the coming of Christ, is evident from the Prophecy of *Malachi*, the last of the Prophets; and yet the fatal Day of their Visitation did not presently come upon them and surprize them; but our Saviour by his Preaching called them to Repentance, and forewarned them of the Destruction of *Jerusalem*, and the Miseries attending it. Now the Reasons of this Point are the same with those of the former; he calls the greater Sinners to Repentance, and forewarns them of the dangerous and fearful Consequents of their continued and final Impenitency, that he may thereby bring them to Repentance, and prevent their Punishment, if it may be; or that in case they repent not, they may be rendred inexcusable, and that the Righteousness of his Severity against them when he reckons with them, may be justified and cleared.

But you may here object against what hath been said; Doth not God often surprize wicked Men with his Judgments? Doth not his Wrath fall upon them on a sudden many times

times, and when they least fear it? Doth it not often take hold of them in the height of their carnal Security, and when they do not so much as dream of any Danger they are in? And is not this to be suddenly and unexpectedly surprized by his terrible Judgments? So the Destruction of wicked Men cometh as a Whirl-wind; that is, both suddenly and irresistibly. So Christ, speaking of the last Judgment at the End of the World, saith, that as a Snare it shall come on all them that dwell on the Face of the whole Earth. It should suddenly and unexpectedly surprize them, as the Bird is surprized that is taken in the Snare. So again, 1 Thess. 5. 2, 3. — *The Day of the Lord so cometh as a Thief in the Night. For when they shall say, Peace and Safety, then sudden Destruction cometh upon them, as Travail upon a Woman with Child; and they shall not escape.* Prov. 1. 27. Luke 21. 35.

To this I answer, That these, and divers others Scriptures to the same purpose, are no way contrary to what hath been said concerning God's giving Warning to the greatest Sinners, and his calling to Repentance before he punisheth. For,

1. That wicked men are often suddenly overtaken and surprized with God's terrible Judgments, is not for want of being warned, but because they will not take Warning: Though they be told from Day to Day of the Judgments of God that seem to be even at the Door, and ready to light upon them, yet

yet they will not believe it; and so whensoever the Judgments of God come upon them, they are surprized; and they come when they think not of them, when they look not for them.

2. 'Tis most just with God that they who have contemned many former Warnings, and would take no Warnings, should at last have no Warning. And this is that which is expressly threatned, *Rev. 3. 2. 3.* where Christ speaking to the Angel of the Church in Sardis, saith, *Be watchful, and strengthen the things that are ready to die, for I have not found thy Works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent.* Here is Warning sufficient: If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a Thief, and thou shalt not know what Hour I will come upon thee. That is in effect, If thou wilt take no Warning, when I at length come upon thee to punish thee, thou shalt have no Warning. And so much by way of Answer to that Objection.

Now to apply very briefly what hath been said concerning this Observation.

Use 1. If God be graciously pleased to call the greatest Sinners to Repentance, and to give them Warning before he punisheth them, then have the greatest Sinners abundant Encouragement to come in to God, and to endeavour to make their Peace with him, how long soever they have stood out against him: They

They may be sure God would never call them to repent, and invite them to come in to him, unless he were most willing to entertain them, and bid them welcome when they come. Far be it from you to harbour such unworthy and dishonourable Thoughts of God, as if he would invite you to come in to him, and then reject you and cast you off when you do come. Whatever your Sins have been, they shall not hinder your being reconciled to him, and your making your Peace with him, if at length you lay down your Arms that you have taken up against him, and cast your self upon his Mercy. But then,

1st. You must do it sincerely and cordially; you may not dally with God, pretending to lay down your Arms to Day, and taking them up again to Morrow. If you expect to find Mercy with him, you must return to him with your whole Heart, and not feignedly.

2^{dly}. You must come in to him speedily, you must do it immediately. He that saith he will repent hereafter, he will repent to Morrow, doth not repent to Day; and for ought he knows may be in another World before the Morrow cometh.

Use 2. If God be graciously pleased to call the greatest Sinners to Repentance; then let us not utterly despair of any whom God calls; let us not be discouraged for using Means

Means for the Conversion of any, for whose Conversion God is still using Means; let us not be weary of waiting for the Conversion of any, for whose Conversion God is still waiting.

There are two things that in this Case usually discourage us, and make us weary of using Means for the reclaiming of Sinners.

1st. If Means have been long used, and no Good hath been done upon them, no Change for the better hath appeared in them.

2^{dly}. If, as sometimes it is, the Means that have been made use of for reclaiming them, and reducing them from the Error of their ways, have made them worse, more obdurate, more obstinate, more opposite to what is offered them, and laid before them for their Good. When thus it is, we are very apt to say, To what purpose should any further Endeavours be used for gaining them who will not be gained, and on whom all Labour that is bestowed is lost? But notwithstanding all this, if God be still pleased to call upon them to return, though they turn the deaf ear to all his Calls, why should we think it much to be still calling on them? Though they hitherto stop their Ears, yet God can bore and open their Ears when he pleaseth; and we know not but that he may yet shew Mercy to them in conquering them, and subduing them to himself by his Grace, how long

soever and how obstinately soever they have persisted in their Impenitency: wherefore let us go on to do our Duty in order to their reclaiming, and let God do what seemeth good in his Eyes.

So I have done with the first Particular in the Text; God's great Mercy to *Manasseh* and his People that had so highly provoked him; he was graciously pleased to call them to Repentance, and to give them Warning of those Evils that were approaching, and would certainly overtake them, and come upon them if they should still persevere in their sinful Courses. How much soever they had provoked him, he would not bring his Judgments upon them till he had first dealt with them by his Prophets, to make them sensible of their Danger, and to bring them to Repentance.

Now followeth the second Particular, the Impenitency and Obstinacy of *Manasseh* and his People; *They would not hearken.* 'Tis not said, They did not hearken, but *they would not hearken.* Which Words imply a wilful disregarding and rejecting of those Admonitions, Reproofs and Warnings that were given them by the Prophets.

Whence we may observe;

That wicked men that have long gone on in a Course of Sin, come sometimes to that Degree of Obstinacy and Hardness of Heart, that no Calls or

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Invitations to Repentance, no Warnings of impending and approaching Judgments will work upon them.

- This their Obstinacy is many ways set forth and represented to us in the holy Scriptures. The Psalmist compares such wicked
- Pf. 84. 5. Men to the deaf Adder, that stoppeth her Ears, and will not hearken to the Voice of the Charmer, charming never so wisely: The meaning is, nothing can be so fitly spoken, but that they refuse to hearken to it. And as they stop their
- Isa. 26. 11. Ears, so they close their Eyes; When thy Hand is lifted up they will not see. So of the perverse and obstinate Jews that lived in the
- Zech. 7. 11, 12. Prophet Zechariah's time, 'tis said, that they refused to hearken, and pulled away the Shoulder, and stopped their Ears, that they should not hear: Yea, they made their Hearts as an Adamant Stone. Of this Unteachableness and Obstinacy of Spirit God complains, saying, My
- Pf. 81. 11. People would not hearken to my Voice, and Israel would none of me. To the same Effect is that most affectionate Speech of our Saviour, O
- Matth. 23. 37. Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy Children together, even as a Hen gathereth her Chickens under her Wings, and ye would not? Yea sometimes so far are wicked Men from hearkning to those gracious Calls and merciful Invitations to Repentance which God vouchsafeth them, that they cannot endure any Man that shall endeavour to make them sensible of their evil Ways, and to withdraw them from their Sins. Upon this Account it was that Abab counted Elijah his
- Enemy:

Enemy: *Hast thou found me, O mine Enemy?* 1 Kings 21. 20.
 said he, when the Prophet came to reprove him, and to denounce the Judgments of God against him and his Family for their Sins. And so impatient were ungodly Men of being reprov'd in the Prophet *Isaiah's* time, that they studied to, do what Mischief they could to such as should attempt to reprove them: *They make a Man an Offender for a Word,* Ill. 29. 21.
and lay a Snare for him that reproveth in the Gate, saith that Prophet. The like Complaint we have, *Amos 5. 10.* *They hate him that rebuketh in the Gate, and abhor him that speaketh uprightly.* Now there are several things that make wicked Men the more obstinate, and that are, if not Causes, yet Occasions of their turning the deaf Ear to all those Calls and Invitations to Repentance, which God vouchsafed them. Such as are,

1st. Outward Prosperity. When the World smiles upon them, when they live at Ease, and enjoy whatever Heart can wish; this through the Corruption of their Hearts puffs them up with Pride, and makes them slight whatever is offered them, or laid before them for the Good of their Souls. This ill Effect had outward Prosperity upon *Jebojacin*; 1 Jer. 22. 21.
spake unto thee in thy Prosperity, and thou saidst, I will not hear. To the same purpose is that of the Psalmist, who speaking of wicked Men, saith, *Because they have no Changes, therefore* Ps. 55. 19.
they fear not God. Because they are not harassed with Afflictions, nor emptied from Vessel

fel to Vessel, therefore they regard not God's Calls to Repentance, nor his Threatnings: He may say what he pleaseth, he may threaten them as severely as he will, they are not moved at it, nor concern themselves with it.

2dly. Another thing that makes them the more obstinate, is, their not believing the Threatnings and Denunciations of Judgments against them for their Sins. Thus the old World not believing what God had threatned concerning the Destruction of the World by the Flood, still continued in their Sins, and repented not, till at length the Flood came upon them, and took them all away, excepting only those few Persons that found Grace in the Eyes of God to be exempted from that dreadful Judgment. So though God had often by his Prophets threatned the Captivity, yet the prophane and obstinate Jews putting far off the evil Day, and giving no Credit to the Threatnings, would not be brought to Repentance. Such were they whom the Prophet *Zephany* described, who being settled on their Lees, said in their Hearts, *The Lord will not do Good, neither will he do Evil*: that is, he would neither fulfil his Promises, nor make good his Threatnings; they believed neither the one nor the other.

Zeph. i.
12.

3dly. Another thing that makes wicked Men the more obstinate, and that hardens them against all Invitations and Calls to Repentance, is the abused Patience and Long-sufferance of God towards them: Because
God

God hath long born with them, therefore they think he will always bear with them; because waiting for their Repentance, he doth not speedily put his Threatnings in Execution, therefore they make account he will never put them in Execution.

Because Sentence against an evil Work is not executed speedily; therefore, the Heart of the Sons of Men is fully set in them to do Evil.

Ecclef. 8.

If Punishment be but deferred and respited for a time, to see if Offenders will not bethink themselves, and by their Repentance prevent that Severity which else must be used against them; even this makes them think they are now in no Danger of being punished, and so they are encouraged to go on in their Sins. Thus the wicked Jews encouraged themselves in their sinful Courses, and in their carnal Security,

saying, *The Days are prolonged, and every Vision faileth.* As if they had said, the Prophets

Ezek. 12.

22.

terrify us with sad Visions, and severe Threatnings and Denunciations of approaching Judgments; but nothing comes of it, all their Visions fail, and we are still in Safety, and so we trust we shall be, notwithstanding all the Frights they would put us into.

4thly. Another thing, and indeed the chief thing that makes wicked Men so obstinate as that they stop their Ears against all Solicitations and Calls to Repentance, is the most entire League that there is between them and their Sins: So dearly do they love their Sins, that they cannot endure to think of parting with them. Whatever can be said to take

them off from their Sins, is of no Account, signifies nothing with them; enjoy their Sins they will, whatever comes of it: They are perfectly deaf to all Charmings that tend to the making a Separation between them and their Lusts. Thus were the Jews so fondly in love with the idolatrous Services of foreign Nations, that after them they would, nothing should with-hold them: *I have loved Strangers, saith Judah, and after them will I go.* Jer. 2. 25. Now to apply very briefly what hath been said concerning this Point.

Use 1. If wicked Men, that have long gone on in a Course of Sin, may and do sometimes come to such a Degree of Obstinacy and Hardness of Heart, that no Admonitions, no Reproofs, no Invitations or Calls to Repentance, no Warnings of approaching Judgments will work upon them, then let no Man that treats with Men about the Concernments of their Souls, think it strange if he sometimes meet with such Men. The World is full of such Men, and ever hath been. The Prophets and Apostles, and our Saviour Christ himself, had to do with such Men: And these later Ages of the World are not better.

But you will say, What's to be done when we meet with such Men? Must we let them alone, because as far as we can see, they are such as hate Instruction, and cast the Words of God behind their back, as the wicked Man is described? *Psalm 50. 17.*

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Answer, No. For,

1. We know not Mens Hearts; and therefore though they seem to be obstinate and incorrigible, yet there may be some Convictions within, and some secret Relentings that we cannot discern.

2. If they should really be as obstinate and incorrigible as they seem to be, and much worse, yet God can work upon them, and change their Hearts, if he please. No Heart is so hard but he can soften it; no Heart is so obstinate but he can subdue it. Wherefore God laid an express Charge upon *Ezekiel* to speak to a perverse and obstinate People, though in all probability his Labour would be lost upon them: *Thou Son of Man shalt speak my Words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, for they are a rebellious House.* And this he is enjoined to do with all Freedom and Boldness, notwithstanding all the Enmity and fierce Opposition which he might thereby procure from such wicked and unreasonable Men as they were with whom he had to do. *Thou Son of Man, be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their Words, though Briers and Thorns be with thee, and thou dost dwell among Scorpions; be not afraid of their Words, nor be dismayed at their Looks, though they be a rebellious House.* And so the Prophet *Isaiab*, who had to do with the same perverse and obstinate People, must deliver his Message, though God in effect told him before-hand, That no Good was to be done upon them, they would rather be worse
Ezek. 2. 7.
Ezek. 2. 6.
than

than better by all that he should say to them:
 Isa. 6. 9, 10. *Go and tell this People, saith he; Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the Heart of this People fat, and make their Ears heavy, and shut their Eyes; lest they see with their Eyes, and hear with their Ears, and understand with their Heart, and convert and be healed. Speak he must unto them; though God foreshewed that this would be the Effect of all his Endeavours with them for their Good.*

Use 2. If wicked Men, that have long gone on in a Course of Sin, may come at length to that degree of Obstinacy and Hardness of Heart, that no Admonitions, no Reproofs, no Calls or Invitations to Repentance, no Warnings of approaching Judgments will work upon them; how great a Mercy then is it, and ought it to be acknowledged, if God be pleased to give any Man a soft and tender Heart, an humble and teachable Spirit; if there be a Willingness to attend to wholsom Counsels, a Willingness to be instructed, to be admonished, and, when need is, to be reprov'd; if God be pleased so to frame a Man's Heart, and so to break and take down his Spirit, as that he can take Admonitions and Reproofs in good part, as that he can receive them patiently and thankfully, as that he can say with David, *Let the Righteous smite me, it shall be a Kindness; let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent Oil which shall not break my Head?* 'Tis certainly matter of

Pf. 141. 5.

of great Thankfulness, if God be pleased to give any Man such a Frame of Heart, such a Temper of Spirit: If it be thus with you, if Counsels, Admonitions and Reproofs upon just Occasions are welcome and acceptable to you; if you cannot only submit to them patiently, but gladly and thankfully entertain them, and bless God for them. Consider, God might have given you up to as great a measure of Obstinacy and Perverseness as that of the most obdurate and refractory Person in the World, that scorns to be admonished, that hates Instruction, and is ready to fly in the Face of any Man that shall reprove him. Your Spirit might have risen, and tumultuated within you as impetuously; your Corruption might have boiled up and run over as violently against any Man that should endeavour to make you sensible of your Sin, as his that is most impatient of Reproof, or of whatever else might conduce to the Good of his Soul. Say therefore to your self, Who maketh thee to differ from another? Hast thou not the same natural Corruption that the very worst, the most obstinate Sinners have? And who is it that restrains that Corruption in thee, and keeps it from breaking out in the most fierce and violent Opposition against Reproof and Christian Admonition, but he that hath placed the Sand for the bound of the Sea, by a perpetual Decree that it cannot pass it? and though the Waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it, as the Prophet speaks.

Jer. 5. 22.

Use 3.

Use 3. If wicked Men, that have long gone on in a Course of Sin, may come at length to that degree of Obstinacy and Hardness of Heart, as that no Admonitions or Reproofs; no Calls or Invitations to Repentance, no Warnings of approaching Judgments will work upon them; then let all impenitent Sinners take heed how they still persevere in their evil Ways, lest by degrees they come to this woful Estate, that nothing that can be said to them will move them at all, or do them any Good, will rouse them up, or awaken them to Repentance. This is a most lamentable Condition, a most fearful Estate, an Estate to be trembled at: And yet in this fearful Estate will your Perseverance in your evil Ways at length end. Wherefore let me intreat you to endeavour to break off your Sins by Righteousness, as *Daniel* counselled

Dan. 4. 27. *Nebuchadnezzar* to do, to break off your Sins speedily while there is any sense of Sin, any little Tenderneſs of Conſcience yet remaining; before your Heart be ſo hardened, as that you be paſt feeling; before your Conſcience comes to be ſeared as with an hot Iron,

2 Tim. 4. 2. as the Apoſtle ſpeaks; before you be given up to a reprobate Mind, as again the ſame Apoſtle ſpeaks.

Now to the end we may never be thus given up, let us endeavour to be always ready and willing to hear whatſoever God ſhall be pleaſed to ſpeak, whoever be the Inſtruments by whom he ſpeaks to us: Let us endeavour

deavour to have both our Ears and our Hearts open to take in and receive whatsoever Counsels, Admonitions, Reproofs or Warnings shall be given us from him. And here let us consider;

1. That 'tis a thing most pleasing and acceptable to God, when a Man is not regardless of what he speaks, but seriously minds it, takes it to Heart, and is affected with it. *To this Man will I look, saith he, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite Spirit, and that trembleth at my Word.* A most remarkable Instance of the gracious Respect that God hath to this Frame of Spirit, is that which is recorded in *2 Kings 22*. There we find that when *Shaphan* the Scribe had read the Book of the Law, that had been found in the House of the Lord, before *Josiah* the King, and all the Curses and Threatnings contained therein, as we may suppose; *Josiah* took it so to Heart, that he rent his Clothes, and sent immediately to enquire of the Lord for himself, for the People, and for all *Judah*, concerning the Words of the Book! For, said he, *great is the Wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our Fathers have not hearkned to the Words of this Book, to do according to all that is written therein concerning us.* So deeply was *Josiah* affected with what God had threatened against that People for their Sins. But now how did God take it at his Hands, that he was thus affected? This you may see in the Answer which *Huldah* the Prophetess, of whom

Isa. 66. 2.

*Ver. 11,
12, 13.*

whom he enquired, returned him at ver. 18, 19, 20. where she having assured that People, that whatsoever Evils God had threatned should certainly come upon them, she adds, with reference to *Josiah*, a very gracious Answer from the Lord: *But to the King of Judah which sent you to enquire of the Lord, thus shall ye say to him, saith she; Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, As touching the Words which thou hast heard; because thine Heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thy self before the Lord, when thou heardest what I spake against this Place, and against the Inhabitants thereof, that they should become a Desolation and a Curse; and hast rent thy Clothes, and wept before me; I also have heard thee, saith the Lord: Behold therefore I will gather thee unto thy Fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy Grave in Peace, and thine Eyes shall not see all the Evil which I will bring upon this Place.*

2. Consider, that to stop a Man's Ears, and to harden a Man's Heart against such Counsels, Admonitions, and Warnings, as God is pleased to give him, is a thing highly displeasing to him, as from the Scriptures afore-cited appears.

The

The Tenth Sermon.

2 CHRON. 33. 10, 11, 12, 13.

And the Lord spake to Manasseh, and to his People: but they would not hearken. Wherefore the Lord brought upon them the Captains of the Host of the King of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the Thorns, and bound him with Fetters, and carried him to Babylon.

And when he was in Affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his Fathers, And prayed unto him, and he was intreated of him, and heard his Supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his Kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God.

I Now go on to the third Particular in my Text, the Course which God was further pleased to take with *Manasseh* in order to his reclaiming, when gracious Calls and Invitations to Repentance, and Warnings of approaching Judgments would not prevail.

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The Lord brought upon them the Captains of the Host of the King of *Assyria*, which took *Manasseh* among the Thorns, and bound him with Fetters, and carried him to *Babylon*.

Whence we may observe,

That when other Means prove ineffectual for the reclaiming of impenitent and obstinate Sinners, God is pleased to make use of Afflictions.

'Tis true, God can effectually reclaim and convert the most stubborn and obstinate, the most obdurate and hard-hearted Sinners without Afflictions. He needs not take the Rod in hand to do his Work upon them. He that made Hearts, can re-make them; he can change and renew them when he pleaseth, and how he pleaseth. He can do it by Means, and he can do it without Means. He can create and infuse Grace in an Instant; he can in the twinkling of an Eye, without the Intervention or Service of any created Instrument, transform the filthiest, the most loathsome and abominable Sinner into a Saint, a Devil into an Angel of Light. There is nothing too hard for him, who being Omnipotent, can do whatsoever he pleaseth. But yet however, ordinarily he makes use of Afflictions for humbling and reclaiming obstinate Sinners, when other Means prevail not. And seeing he doth make use of Afflictions, we must conclude that he judgeth That the best and fittest Course, for otherwise he would not make choice of it.

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We may perhaps in favour to our selves, be apt to think this great Work might be much better effected without Afflictions. Our carnal Wisdom may apprehend that it would more conduce to the exalting and magnifying of God's Power and Goodness, if this great Work of changing and renewing the Hearts of obstinate Sinners were effected by the immediate Hand of God, and the powerful Operation of his Spirit on the Heart, without the Suffering, the Smart, or Duration of the Sinner. But alas! who are we that we should presume to oppose our foolish Reasonings against his Infinite Wisdom? Whatever our dark, selfish and partial Reason may suggest to the contrary, that must needs be the best and fittest Course that could be taken which God hath pitched on: no better Course could be thought on, no wiser Method could be devised for bringing Sinners to Repentance, and for working a Change in them, than that which he hath made choice of. When we have considered the Matter, this we must of necessity grant, unless we will make our selves wiser than God, unless we will take upon us to dictate and prescribe to him a better way than he hath contrived.

Now for the Proof and Confirmation of this Point, that God is pleased to make use of Afflictions for the reclaiming of obstinate Sinners, when other Means prevail not, I need not say much; our own Experience is a sufficient Confirmation thereof. There is
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no Man that hath observed God's Dealings with the Sons of Men, but must have taken notice that nothing is more ordinary in the Course of God's Providence, than to bring them home to himself by Afflictions, who will not otherwise be reduced from the Error of their ways. And as he takes this Course with wicked Men to convert them, so he takes the same Course with his Children to recall them, and to bring them into the right way again when they have gone astray. This was the Course which he took with *David*, as he himself acknowledgeth: *Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep thy Word.* Psal. 119. 67. And again; *It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy Statutes.* Ver. 71. He means, that he might so learn God's Statutes as to practice them, and frame his Life and Conversation according to them.

Now to apply this Truth briefly.

Use 1. If God be pleased to make use of Afflictions for reclaiming and reducing Sinners, when other Means will not prevail; then if Men be wise, and if they would prevent and keep off Afflictions, it concerns them to improve those other Means which God makes use of; I mean, Instructions, Admonitions, Reproofs and Warnings; humbling themselves for their Sins, and reforming their Lives, that so God may not bring those Afflictions upon them which will be grievous to them. What Folly and Madnes is it when

when Men will put God to lay sore and grievous things upon them, because they will not be wrought upon by gentler Means? *Solomon* saith, *A Reproof entreteth more into a wise Man,* Prov. 17. *than an hundred Stripes into a Fool.* So then in the Judgment of *Solomon*, he is a wise Man into whom a Reproof enters; that is, on whom it makes Impressions, and by whom it is entertained and improved: but *be that hateth Reproof is brutish.* He is so far from being a wise Man, that he is scarce a Man; he is more like a Brute than a Man; he understands not his own Interest, which is to take Reproofs to Heart, to be affected with them, and to make a good Use of them, and not by rejecting them to draw those Evils upon himself which he might avoid if he would. Consider this, you that are now admonished, reprov'd and warn'd, but will not hearken: Do you know what you do? As much as in you lies, you put the Rod in to God's Hand to correct you severely, and to make you smart sorely, to try if that Course may not take better Effect upon you than those milder Courses which he hath hitherto taken with you. Why should you consult and procure Sorrow, Sufferings and Smart to your self? How much better had it been for *Manasseh* to have hearkned to the Message of the Lord, brought to him by the Prophets, and not by his Disobedience and Obstinacy to have procured the Captains of the Host of the King of *Assyria* to be sent against him, to bind him with Fetters, and carry him

him to Babylon? When we suffer for our Sins, then we condemn and cry out against our selves, that we should be so foolishly obstinate as not to hearken to good Counsel when time was, whereby we might have prevented our Sufferings. But so it is, that in things of this Nature we seldom learn Wit till we have bought it, and paid dearly for it.

Use 2. If God be pleased to make use of Afflictions to reclaim and reduce Sinners when other Means will not prevail, then let such as are afflicted be careful that they do not impatiently murmur, and fret against the Lord who correcteth them. For,

1. They may thank themselves that are corrected; they have been the Authors and Procurers of their own Sufferings. If they would have been humbled and reformed by gentler Means, there would have been no need of those severer Courses which now are taken with them. God is not forward to correct; he takes no such Delight in correcting, as to take the Rod in Hand when there is no need of it. He doth not afflict willingly; he never doth it but when there is great Cause for it, and our obstinate Perseverance in our Sins against all other Means makes Correction necessary.

2. They have so little Reason to fret and murmur against God for correcting them, that they have great Cause to be thankful to God for his Care of them, and that he doth not leave

leave them now to themselves, and suffer them to go on in their Sins to their Ruine, seeing they refuse to hearken to him, and harden their Hearts again all good Counsels, Admonitions, Reproofs and Warnings by which he hath solicited and provoked them to Repentance. Having found them so perverse and refractory, how justly might he now rid his Hands of them, look no more after them, but *give them up to their own Hearts* Ps. 81. 12.
Left; and let them alone to walk in their own Counsels; as in the like Case he dealt with *Israel*? 'Tis an Argument of his great Love to them, that he will make Trial of all sorts of Means whereby they may be brought to Repentance, before he will utterly cast them off, and meddle no more with them, or concern himself any further about their Good.

Use 3. If God be pleased to make use of Afflictions for reclaiming and reducing of Sinners, when other Means prevail not, then let such as are afflicted endeavour to comply with God's Design in afflicting them. They would not be won by gentler Means, and therefore now God is trying whether his Rod may not effect that Good in them which his Word alone would not. Be not so obstinate and refractory as to render all Means ineffectual which God makes use of for reclaiming you, as to defeat and frustrate the Design of all those Methods of his Wisdom and Goodness by which you might be gained, and be brought home to him. Labour to answer
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God's

- God's End in correcting you, and be persuaded to hear the Rod, as God by the Prophet enjoins. Although you have stopped your Ears against the Word; let not the same Complaint be taken up against you that was taken up by the Prophet against the Jews: O Lord, are not thine Eyes upon the Truth? thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive Correction: they have made their Faces harder than a Rock, they have refused to return. Search after, and endeavour to find out the Sins for which God hath a Controversy with you; be truly humbled for them, earnestly seek unto God for the Pardon of them; cast them off, and forsake them. If God's Chastisements take you not off from your Sins; if no Severities will imbitter them to you, and make you willing to leave them, then what remains but that God should look upon you as an incorrigible Person, as one whose Disease is incurable, and so leave you to perish in your Iniquity? Thus God left Ephraim to take the Course which pleased him, when it appeared that his Heart was so set upon his Idols that nothing would bring him out of love with them: Ephraim is joined to Idols, let him alone. To be thus let alone, in that indeed which wicked Men would have; they would still gratify their Lusts, go on in their Sins quietly, and not be disturbed in the Enjoyment of them. This is in their Account the greatest Happiness: but 'tis indeed the most dreadful Effect of God's highest Indignation

nation against them. It were a thousand times better, and more eligible, that all the Calamities and Miseries in the World should light upon a Man, than that God should say of him, He is an obstinate and incorrigible Sinner, he is one that will not be reformed by any thing that I have said or done; wherefore let him alone, let him take his Fill of Sin, he shall have no more Disturbance from me till I come to reckon with him once for all. Do you not tremble at the fearful State of such a Man? If you do not, you justly may. O take heed lest by your stubborn and obstinate Perseverance in your Sins against all Means for reclaiming you, you at length bring your self into it.

And this may suffice to have been spoken concerning that Point. The Point which I have now last spoken to, was but general, as arising from the Consideration of the Course in general which God took with *Mannasseh* for humbling and reclaiming him: when gentler Means did no Good upon him, God made use of Afflictions.

I come to a more particular Consideration of that Affliction which God was pleased to lay upon him; *The Lord brought upon them, upon him and his People, the Captains of the Host of the King of Assyria, and they took Mannasseh among the Thorns, and bound him with Fetters, and carried him to Babylon.* And here;

The Tenth Sermon.

1st. Whereas 'tis said, that *the Lord brought upon them the Captains of the Host of the King of Assyria,*

We may observe, That 'tis of God that one Nation makes War against another; that one Country invades another, and subjects it to all the Miseries and Calamities of the Sword. This is frequently in the holy Scriptures ascribed to the over-ruling Providence of God, and that not only in way of mere Permission, but so as God is made in some Sense the Author and Procurer of Wars and Invasions, and the Inflicter of all the Miseries that attend them. Here the Lord is said to have brought upon *Manasseh* and his People the Captains of the Host of the King of *Assyria*. Thus in *2 Kings 24. 2, 3, 4.* we read, that *the Lord sent against Jehoiakin Bands of the Chaldees, and Bands of the Syrians, and Bands of the Moabites, and Bands of the Children of Ammon; and that he sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the Word that he had spoken by his Servants the Prophets.* And by way of further Confirmation that all this was of God, it follows in the next Words, *Surely at the Commandment of the Lord came this upon Judah, to remove them out of his Sight, for the Sins of Manasseh.* And thus is God said to have stirred up *Hadad the Edomite* against *Solomon*: and to have stirred up another Adversary against him, *Rezon the Son of Eliadah*. So God, speaking of the Executioners of his Justice whom he would make use of to punish his People, saith, he would *lift up an Ensign*

2 Kings
11. 14.
Ver. 23.

Isa. 5. 26.

to the Nations from far, and that he would hiss
unto them from the Ends of the Earth, that they
might come with Speed swiftly. So again, speak-
ing of his calling for other Nations to invade
the Land, he saith, The Lord shall hiss for the *Ira. 7. 18,*
Flee that is in the uttermost part of the River of *19.*
Egypt, and for the Bee that is in the Land of
Assyria; and they shall come, and shall rest all of
them in the desolate Valleys. So describing a
cruel and implacable Enemy which he would
cause to invade them, he saith, Behold, I will *Jer. 8. 17.*
send Serpents, Cockatrices among you, which will
not be charmed, and they shall bite you. Behold, *Jer. 16. 16.*
I will send for many Fishers, and they shall fish
them: and after that I will send for many Hun-
ters, and they shall hunt them from every Moun-
tain, and from every Hill, and out of the Holes of
the Rocks. Behold, I will send and take all the *Jer. 25. 9.*
Families of the North, saith the Lord, and Ne-
buchadnezzar the King of Babylon my Servant,
and will bring them against this Land, and a-
gainst the Inhabitants thereof. O Assyrian, *Ira. 10. 5, 6.*
the Rod of mine Anger, and the Staff in their
Hand is mine Indignation. I will send him against
an Hypocritical Nation, and against the People of
my Wrath will I give him a Charge to take the
Spoil, and to take the Prey, and to tread them
down like the Mire in the Streets. I have com- *Ira. 13. 3, 4.*
manded my sanctified Ones, I have also called my
mighty Ones for mine Anger. The Voice of a Mul-
titude in the Mountains, as of a great People; a
tumultuous Noise of the Kingdoms of Nations ga-
thered together: the Lord of Hosts mustereth the
Host of the Battel. This is to be understood

of the *Medes* whom God would imploy for the Destruction of *Babylon* under the Conduct of *Cyrus*, as is afterwards more plainly expressed, *ver. 17.* where God saith, *Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, which shall not regard Silver; and as for Gold, they shall not delight in it.* Thus we see that God is said to stir up Adversaries, to hiss for his Enemies, to send and imploy them against a sinful People that is to be punished, to call them the Rod of his Anger, to stile them his sanctified Ones. Such Instruments as he hath made choice of, and set a-part for the Service of being Executioners of his Wrath; he calls them his Servants, he is said to command them, and to give them a Charge to perform the Work which he sets them about; he is said to lift up an Ensign for them, and to muster their Armies. By all which Expressions 'tis evident, that 'tis not only by his Permission, but by his Order and Appointment that one Nation takes up Arms against, and invades another. But here however we must take heed that we make not God the Author or Abettor of the Sins of Men. He neither infuseth any Malice or Wickedness into their Hearts, nor stirs them up by any sinful Motives to act as they do. As his Ends and Designs are most just and holy, so are all the Means and Expedients which he makes use of for compassing those Ends. How and in what manner his most wise, powerful, holy and righteous Providence influenceth and over-ruleth, directs and orders, moderates
and

and governs. the very worst Actions of the very worst Men, is one of those deep things of God which are rather to be adored in Silence, than rashly to be discoursed of and determined. Most sure we are, that God makes use of wicked Men, and serves himself of them even in those things by which they most highly provoke him; and yet as sure we are, that he doth all this most righteously, he being *just in all his ways, and holy in all his Works.* Psal. 149. 17. In this therefore let us acquiesce and rest satisfied; and instead of attempting to dive into those profound Counsels of God, which while we are here we shall never be able fully and comprehensively to understand our selves, much less to unfold and explain them to others; let us see what Use and Improvement may be made of what hath been spoken.

Use. Is it of God that one Nation makes War with, and invades another? Then let us acknowledge God, and take notice of his Hand in all Dispensations of this nature.

I. Are other Nations infested with War? Have they been harassed, laid desolate, and even ruined by the Sword, while we in this Land have been at rest, sitting quietly under our own Vines and Fig-trees, and drinking the Waters of our own Cisterns? Let us be sensible of the unspeakable Goodness, Patience, and Long-sufferance of God toward us in this merciful Dispensation. Surely it cannot

not be denied but that our Sins have been as great as the Sins of those our Neighbours abroad, that have most suffered by the Sword. Yea rather, if the Aggravations of our Sins be well considered, it must be acknowledged that our Sins have not only equalled, but exceeded theirs. For our Mercies and Deliverances have not been common and ordinary, but signal and eminent; and these have not a little heightened our Provocations. What other Account therefore can be given of God's Forbearance towards us in a time when he hath shewed so much Severity against other Nations, but that *he is gracious to whom he will be gracious, and sheweth Mercy to whom he will shew Mercy*, as he himself hath declared? Let us all be duly affected with this his admirable Patience towards a most sinful People, and give him the Glory of it.

Exod. 33.
19.

2. Are we at present full of many just Fears that it may ere long be our Lot to drink of the same Cup that our Neighbours beyond the Sea have drank of? Do our own intestine Rents and Divisions, which were never more sad than at present, and the bloody Machinations of those many Enemies which we have within our own Bowels, threaten us at home? And do our Enemies abroad lie at the Catch to take the Advantages against us which our Divisions give them, and to make the utmost Improvement of them? Do these things, together with the Thoughts of our crying Sins, fright us, and make us
question

question whether the Dregs of that Cup of trembling which hath been put into the Hands of others, may not be reserved for us? Amidst our Fears,

1st. Let us look up to God who thus shakes his Rod over the Land, and by sound Repentance and Reformation, personal Reformation, let us make our Peace with him who ruleth over all the Kingdoms of the World, and hath the Hearts of all Men, even of Kings, in his Hand, and turns them as the Rivers of Water, whither-soever he will. This is the best way to be secured against all Adversaries, so far as it shall be for God's Glory and our Good. *When a Man's Ways please the Lord, he will make his Enemies to be at peace with him.* Prov 21.1. Prov.16.7.

2^{dly}. Having made our own Peace with God, let us be truly humbled for the Sins of the Land, and more especially for those Sins which most threaten us with the Invasion of a foreign Enemy; such as are, our Imitation of the Vices of other Nations; our Compliance with them, or our Approaches to them in any of their Superstitions; our aping them, and conforming to them in their vain and phantastical Garbs and Fashions. In respect of these things the Jews doted upon the *Babylonians*, and were fondly in love with them; for which Sins God threatned to give them up into their Hands, as we may see. If we can be thoroughly humbled for our own Sins, and be reformed; and if we can be sincerely humbled

bled for, and heartily mourn over the Sins of the Land, we shall hereby take the most effectual Course for securing our selves against whatsoever may be coming on the Nation. We read *Ezek. 9.* that God commanded a Mark to be set upon the Foreheads of the Men that sighed and cried for all the Abominations that were done in the midst of *Jerusalem*, that the Executioners of his Wrath might pass them by, and spare them. And 'tis also the best Course that we can take for obtaining Mercy for the Land, and for averting those Judgments which the Sins thereof cry aloud to Heaven for. By the Intercessions of a few, thus humbling themselves for their own Sins, and mourning for the Sins of others, the Wrath of God is sometimes turned away from the Places where they live. But however, they are sure to deliver their own Souls, though they cannot obtain Mercy for others, as we may gather from *Ezek. 14. 14.*

And this may suffice to have been spoken concerning the Lord's bringing upon *Manasseh* and his People the Captains of the Host of the King of Assyria. What these Captains did, and with what Success they managed their Business, is express'd in the Words following; *They took Manasseh in the Thorns, and bound him with Fetters, and carried him to Babylon. They took Manasseh in the Thorns*; it was, as it seems, a Place of Thorns or Thickets, whither *Manasseh* in the Dread and Consternation of Spirit under which he was, had fled

to hide and shelter himself from the Enemy. So we read in 1 Sam. 13. 6. that the Israelites being greatly distressed by the Philistines that oppressed them, *did hide themselves in Caves, and in Thickets, and in Rocks, and in high Places, and in Pits.* Now whereas Manasseh, though a King, was brought into that Distress, that he was constrained to hide himself in the Thorns from his Enemies, we may observe,

That great Men, and Persons of high Places, and great Dignity, may sometimes be reduced to great Extremities, and to be put to make use of hard Shifts to preserve themselves.

Sisera the Captain General and Commander in chief of the Army of *Jabin* King of *Canaan*, was forced to light off his Chariot, and on his Feet to betake himself to the House of *Heber* the *Kenite*, to save his Life, which yet he could not do, but lost it there by the Hand of a Woman. *Zedekiah* King of *Judah*, and his Nobles, were constrained to dig through a Wall, to make way for their Flight in the Night, that they might not fall into the Hands of the *Chaldees*; and yet was *Zedekiah* taken by them, and being bound with Fetters, saw his Sons slain before his Eyes; and then after that lamentable Spectacle, the last that ever he saw, had his Eyes put out. All Ages, and even our own times, have been full of the like Instances of the Mutability and Uncertainty of all earthly things. The Consideration hereof may be useful to us several ways.

Judg. 4.
15, 16, 17.

Ezek. 12.
Jer. 39.

1. Hence

1. Hence may such as are in Places of Eminency above others, or enjoy more of the things of this World than others do, learn not to trust in their Riches, Honour, Power, Greatness, or whatever else it is in which they excel others. All these things are fading and transitory, they are inconstant and unstable, they have their Turns and Revolutions; he that is full to Day, may be empty to Morrow; he that is now uppermost, may ere long be nethermost. How high soever any Man be, God can bring him low enough before he dies: *Although thou exalt thy self as the Eagle; and though thou set thy Nest among the Stars, yet thence will I bring thee down, said the Lord to Edom.* Of this sad Change *Jeremiah* complains, and laments over it; *They that did feed delicately, are desolate in the Streets: they that were brought up in Scarlet, embrace Dunghills.* A remarkable Instance we have of the Instability and Uncertainty of these temporal things, in *Belisarius*, a great and famous Commander of the Forces of *Justinian* the Emperor. This renowned and victorious General, after that he had subdued the *Persians*, overcome the *Goths*, and vanquished the *Vandals*; and by these his Victories raised himself so high as that he became the Object both of the Fear and Envy of Equals and Inferiors, was at length reduced to that Want and Misery, that he was constrained to beg by the High-way-side, crying out to Travellers that passed by, *Dauid Obulum Belisario, give a Half-penny to Belisarius.* *La*

Obad. 4.

Lam. 4. 5.

Man therefore take Account that he stands so fast and firm, but that his Feet may slip; and he may take a Fall; and the higher he is, the more dangerous will his Fall be. Neither is there any thing that threatens a Man more with a Fall, than carnal Security, and a vain Confidence of the Firmness and Stability of his present Station, and the Unchangeableness of that prosperous Condition in which he is. When David said, In his Prosperity, I shall never be moved; Lord, by thy Favour thou hast made my Mountain to stand strong: God did but hide his Face, and he was troubled. When Men shall say, Peace and Safety, then sudden Destruction cometh upon them, as Travail upon a Woman with Child, and they shall not escape. When Mystical Babylon saith, I sit as a Queen, and am no Widow, and shall see no Sorrow: Then shall her Plagues come in one Day, Death, and Mourning, and Famine; and she shall be utterly burnt with Fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.

Psal. 30.
6, 7.

1 Thess.
5. 3.

Rev. 18.
7, 8.

Hence you may also learn, not to insult over those who having formerly been in a better Condition, are now brought low; their present Condition may be your own; you have no absolute Security against being emptied from Vessel to Vessel, as they have been, or against being subjected to the same Changes which they have undergone. The Consideration hereof should beget in you Moderation towards Sufferers, and such a compassionate Sense of their Adversities, as becomes them who remember that they themselves

Heb. 13. 3. selves are still in the Body, as the Apostle speaks.

3. Seeing the Highest may be brought low, and none are exempted from being obnoxious to Changes and Adversities, it concerns all to prepare for Changes, and to be always in a readiness to entertain them. And those whose Condition hath elevated them above the common Sort, and set them on high, have so much the greater reason to be prepared for Changes, because they are most in danger of them, they being more exposed to Concussions and Shakings; as the tall Oaks and lofty Cedars are more exposed to the Violence of Storms and Tempests, than the lower Shrubs are. Again, it concerns these above others to labour to be prepared for Changes, because they are so apt to think themselves to be above the reach of them: For this fond Conceit is attended with two great Mischiefs.

(1.) Their fancying themselves above the reach of Changes, exposeth them to Changes so much the sooner; for the evil Day is so much the nearer unto Men, by how much they put it farther off from themselves.

(2.) When Changes come upon Men that had no expectation of them, and that made sure account they were in no danger, they are surprized with them, and the Surprizal makes them the more grievous to them.

Quest.

Quest. But you will say, Though none, no not the highest, be exempted from being subject to Changes, yet may not something be done towards the preventing of Changes, and securing our selves against them?

Ans. I answer, Though nothing that can be done, can absolutely secure the highest against Changes, yet there are some things that do very much conduce towards Mens Safety and Security; and they are these that follow.

1. Humility. To have a low and humble Heart in a high Condition, is both a great Ornament, and a great Security to a Man. Solomon saith, *A Man's Pride shall bring him low; but Honour shall uphold the humble in Spirit.* And St. James saith out of Solomon also, though with some little Alteration, *God resisteth the Proud, but giveth Grace unto the Humble. Pride goeth before Destruction, and an haughty Spirit before a Fall.* And again, *Before Destruction the Heart of a Man is haughty, and before Honour is Humility.* I shall add but one Place more, which shall be *Job 40. 10, 11, 12.* where God himself speaking to Job, and setting before him for his Humiliation, God's incomparable Greatness and transcendent Excellencies, manifested in the Effects of his Power, Wisdom and Goodness, saith, *Deck thy self now with Majesty and Excellency, and array thy self with Glory and Beauty; cast abroad the Rage of thy Wrath, and behold every one that is proud, and abase him: Look on every one that*

Prov. 29.
23.

Jam. 4. 6.

Prov. 16.
18.

Prov. 18.
12.

Prov. 6.
16, 17.

is proud, and bring him low. In which Words God tells *Job* what he is wont to do, and bids him do the like if he be able; thereby to convince him of the infinite Distance between God and him. But that which is to my present Purpose, is, that God here makes his casting abroad the Rage of his Wrath, and his beholding every one that is proud that he may abase him, and his looking upon every one that is proud that he may bring him low, an Instance of the great Works of God's most wise, powerful and righteous Providence. So then this is the constant Course of his Providence to behold and abase whoever is proud; and he is said to cast abroad the Rage of his Fury when he doth it, to note the high Indignation that he hath against that Sin, which therefore is said to be an Abomination to him. These six things doth the Lord hate; yea seven are an Abomination to him: A proud Look, a lying Tongue, and Hands that shed innocent Blood, &c. So then a proud Look is in *Solomon's* Catalogue the first of those Sins that are an Abomination to the Lord. By these Scriptures it is apparent that the Sin of Pride is most hateful and abominable in the sight of God, that he casts his Eyes about and beholds every one that is proud, that he may abase him and bring him low; that he resisteth the Proud, and sets himself against him, but supports and upholds the humble in Spirit. Wherefore, I say, if such as are high would prevent a Fall, they must be humble.

2. They

2. They must acknowledge the free Bounty and Goodness of God in what they are or have above others, and give him the Glory of it. They must not think that they shine in a higher Orb, and have more of the World than others have, because they are better, and have deserved more at the Hands of God than others, but reckon that they owe all to the pure and undeserved Mercy of God, which alone hath distinguished them from him that is clothed with Rags, and begs his Bread from door to door; Thus *Jacob* professed himself unworthy of all that God had done for him, and conferred on him: *I am not worthy of the least of all the Mercy, and of all the Truth which thou hast shewed unto thy Servant.* And so *David*, in an humble sense of his utter Unworthiness of what God had done for him, cries out, *Who am I, O Lord God! and what is my House that thou hast brought me hither to?* Your acknowledging God in what you are and have, and your giving him the Glory of it, is one good Mean for obtaining the continuance of what you enjoy; for God delights to do good to them that humbly and thankfully acknowledge his Goodness. But when you take no notice of God in what you enjoy, when you give him not your humble and thankful Acknowledgments thereof, and ascribe all to his free Mercy, then are you in the ready way to be deprived of whatever you have received at his Hands. Thus when God's People *did not know*, that is, did not thankfully acknowledge

Gen. 32.10.

1 Chron. 17. 16.

ledge that God gave them Corn and Wine and
 Hof. 2. 8, 9. Oil, and multiplied their Silver and Gold, then
 he threatned to take away his Corn in the time
 thereof, and to recover from them his Wool and
 his Flax, which he had given them to cover their
 Nakedness. Our humble and thankful Ac-
 knowledgment of God in what we have, is
 the Tribute and Homage, the high Rent, as
 it were, which he expecteth from us; and
 when this is not duly paid him, we forfeit all
 into his Hands.

3. If such as are in Place of Eminency
 above their Brethren, and are intrusted with
 a larger Portion of the good things of this
 World than others have, would prevent a Fall,
 and obtain at the Hands of God the continu-
 ance of these his Mercies to them, they must
 make a good use of what they excel others in,
 and of what they are intrusted with above their
 Brethren. Hath God placed them in a higher
 Sphere above their Brethren? Hath he made
 them the Head, and not the Tail? Let them
 use their Power, not to crush and oppress
 their Inferiours, but to strengthen, support
 and uphold them. Hath God richly furnish-
 ed them with a plentiful Portion of outward
 Things? Let them make a sober and tem-
 perate use of them themselves, and be help-
 ful to others out of that Abundance which
 God hath blest them with. This is the way
 to secure to themselves what through the
 Bounty and Goodness of God they are at
 present possessed of. *The liberal Man deviseth
 liberal things, and by liberal things he shall stand.*
 This

Isa. 32. 8.

This is one special Duty properly belonging to those whose Cup God hath made to overflow. Charge them that are rich in this World, ^{1 Tim. 6.} that they be not high minded, nor trust in uncertain Riches, but in the living God, who giveth us all things richly to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good Works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, laying up in store for themselves a good Foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal Life. But when Persons of higher Place shall make use of their Power to the wronging and trampling under their feet such as have no power to resist them; and when they shall abuse their Abundance to Drunkenness, Gluttony and Excess, and to the accomodating and furnishing themselves with what may supply and feed their Pride and Vanity, they take the ready Course to be despoiled and stripp'd of all those Blessings which they so horribly dishonour God by, making them the Instruments of their Sin, and turning them into Fewel for their Lusts.

And so I have done with that Observation.

In the next place; Whereas *Manasseh's* hiding himself in the Thorns did him no service, stood him in no stead at all; whereas even in the Thorns, where it was not likely that a Prince should have hid himself, he was found out, seized on, bound with Fetters, and thence carried to *Babylon*; we may observe,

That when God will punish Men for their Sins, no Means which they can make use of, shall secure them from his Judgments.

This is a Truth that no Man can question who believes and acknowledgeth the Infinite Power and Wisdom of God, and the Absolute Dominion and Sovereignty that he hath over all his Creatures.

1. He being Infinite in Power, can do
Isa. 43. 13. whatsoever he pleaseth. *If he will work, who*
Isa. 40. 10. *can let him?* as he himself speaks. *My Coun-*
sel shall stand, saith he, and I will do all my
Pleasure.

2. He being Infinite in Wisdom as well as in Power, knows how to contrive and order, to dispose of and direct, over-rule and govern all the Means conducing to their Punishment, so as all the Wisdom of Men and Angels shall not be able to devise or contrive any thing that may counterwork his Counsels, or hinder the Accomplishment of his Designs.

3. He moreover having an Absolute Dominion and Sovereignty over all Creatures, and they being all at his Command, he can either imploy them as he pleaseth for punishing such as he will punish, or forbid them to be helpful to them, and restrain them from doing any thing whereby they may be rescued from Punishment. Wherefore,

(1.) When

(1.) When God will punish Men, when he will have them suffer for their Sins, he will sometimes disenable them to make use of any Means whereby they may help themselves. When they should run away from Danger, they have no Power to do it, but stand still as Men confounded and astonished, till their Fears overtake them, and come upon them: when they should act to secure themselves against the Evils which threaten them, they cannot find their Hands, as the Psalmist speaks. When they should be casting about and contriving what may be for their Safety and Security, they are at their Wits end, and cannot make use of their Reason to relieve themselves in their Distresses: *Their Wisdom faileth them*, as Solomon speaks. Psal. 76.5. Eccl. 10.3.

(2.) Sometimes again when they contrive and consult for their Safety, God blasteth their Counsels, and turnis them into Foolishness; when they make use of Means, God makes the very Means which they made use of for their Preservation, an occasion of their Ruine: As *Sisera* betaking himself to the House of *Heber the Kenite*, to save his Life, lost it, and met with that Destruction there, which by running thither he sought to avoid; while he flies from the Sword, he meets with a Nail that pierced through his Temples. If they escape one Judgment, they are overtaken by another. Thus *Sennacherib* having escaped the Peril of the Sword abroad, is slain at home in the House of *Nisroch* his God, by those that came out of his own

Amos 5.
19.

Jer. 48.
43, 44.

Pfal. 139.
7, 8, 9, 10.

Bowels. Thus God threatning wicked Men, saith, it shall be with them, *as if a Man did flee from a Lion, and a Bear met him; or went into the House, and laid his Hand on the Wall, and a Serpent bit him.* Much to the same Effect God threatning Moab, saith, *Fear, and the Pit, and the Snare, shall be unto thee. He that fleeth from the Fear, shall fall into the Pit; and he that getteth out of the Pit, shall be taken in the Snare.* When once a Man hath by his Sins made himself obnoxious to the Justice of God, whither can he flee from his revenging Hand? Whithersoever he goes, he is sure to meet with an incensed God: Whithersoever he withdraws himself, he cannot run away from him who is Omnipresent. *Can any bide himself in secret Places, saith the Lord? Do not I fill Heaven and Earth, saith the Lord?* Jer. 23. 24. *Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? and whither shall I flee from thy Presence? saith the Psalmist: If I ascend up into Heaven, thou art there: if I make my Bed in Hell, behold thou art there: If I take the Wings of the Morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the Sea; even there shall thy Hand lead me, and thy right Hand shall hold me. If a Man be your Enemy, and seeks to do you a Mischief, you may possibly get you away from him, and retire you to some place or other, where he shall not be able to find you, or where he may not reach you. Though Kings have long Arms, as we say, and can by themselves and by their Ministers and Instruments reach a great way, yet they cannot reach so far, but that*

that sometimes such as have offended them make a shift to get them out of their reach. But if a Man shall have offended God, if he shall by his Provocations have made God his Enemy, whither can he betake himself where he may be without the reach of his Justice? Surely he must go out of the World that would go away from God: And if he should so do, yet would he meet with God in the other World, and even there would he fall under his Sin-revenging Justice. Hence it is that God often speaks of himself, as of one that hath such a powerful Arm, and such irresistible Might, that no created Power can rescue any out of his Hand, when he hath determined to make them Instances of his Justice, and of his fierce Indignation against Sin, by inflicting exemplary Punishments on them. Having threatned, severely threatned to reckon with the wicked, the obstinate and impenitent Sinner, that in the height of his carnal Security, thinks God to be altogether such an one as himself; he at length concludes, *Consider this, ye that forget God, lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver you, Psal. 50. 22. Ye are my Witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God. Yea, before the Day was, I am he; and there is none that can deliver out of my Hand, Isa. 43. 12, 13. See now, that I, even I am he, and there is no God with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal; neither is there any that can deliver out of my Hand. For I lift up my Hand to Heaven, and say, I live for ever. If I whet my Sword, and*
my

my Hand take hold on Judgment, I will render Vengeance to mine Enemies, and reward them that hate me. I will make mine Arrows drunk with Blood, and my Sword shall devour Flesh, Deut. 32. 39, 40, 41, 42. Thus I have shewed, that when God will punish Men for their Sins, no Means they can make use of, shall secure them against his Judgments. Neither their high Quality in the World, nor the Eminency of their Rank and Condition, nor their Honours, nor their Power, nor their Policy, nor their Riches, nor their Interests, nor their Friends, nor any thing else that can be named, shall do them any Good, or stand them in any stead, to interpose between them and the Wrath of God, and skreen off his Judgments from them. I come now to apply this Point briefly.

Use 1. Let no Man therefore, let no impenitent Sinner be encouraged to go on in his evil Ways by the vain Hopes of going unpunished, and of escaping the Judgments of God. A Man that shall thus flatter himself, that makes account he shall be able to find Means to escape the Judgments of God whoever be punished; such an one above all others shall be sure to be punished most severely. Consider how dreadfully God hath threatned such hardned, secure, and fearless Sinners: *He that blesseth himself in his heart, saying, I shall have Peace, though I walk in the Imagination of my heart, to add Drunkenness to Thirst: The Lord will not spare him, but the anger*

Deut. 29.
19, 20.

anger of the Lord, and his Jealousy shall smoke again that Man; and all the Curses that are written in the Law shall lie upon him: and the Lord shall blot out his Name from under Heaven. Such secure Sinners were those whom God threatned: *It shall come to pass that I will search Jerusalem with Candles, and will punish them that are settled on their Lees, and that say in their Hearts, The Lord will not do Good, neither will he do Evil.* As if they had said, The Lord is in Heaven, and regards not what is done by us here below; he will neither reward us if we do well, nor punish us if we do ill. Such obdurate and secure Sinners as these, God would find out wheresoever they should be; he would search *Jerusalem with Candles* for them, that he might punish them. Not one of them that upon the narrowest Search could be found out, should escape his righteous Judgments. So again, God threatned that such as did *put far away the evil Day*, Amos 6.3, did make account that the Day of Visitation, 4. 5. 7. when God would reckon with them for their Sins, would never come, or that it would be long enough before it would come; and that thereupon *caused the Seat of Violence to come near*; gave themselves to Rapine, Oppression and Injustice; and moreover glutted themselves with sinful Pleasures and Delights, addicting themselves to all manner of Riot and Excess; I say, God threatned these secure Sinners, that they *should go captive with the first that should go captive.* So then, none are more sure to be punished,

ed, and to be punished severely and speedily, than they who least fear it, and who are most confident of their Safety and Security.

Use 2. Let all impenitent Sinners therefore be perswaded and exhorted to labour to make their Peace with God, and to do it speedily, lest the Judgments of God overtake them, and come upon them, before they have done it. Let them not be slack herein, and put it off from Day to Day, as if it there were no Danger in delaying it. They may, perhaps, think there is very little in those Threatnings and Denunciations of Judgments which they often hear; and that such an evil Day as they have been frightened with, shall never come; or if it do come, that they shall be able to make a shift to secure themselves well enough: They have such and such Advantages above other Men; and therefore whoever suffer, they hope they may find Means to be exempted from suffering. But let none deceive themselves; these are but idle Dreams and vain Fancies. When God comes to visit Mens Sins upon them, he comes irresistibly. All the Means in the World for keeping off God's Judgments, all their Advantages for securing themselves will signify nothing. Whatever they may seem to have to safe-guard and protect themselves against the Wrath of God, their Sins have made them naked, as *Moses* said of the *Israelites*. They lie as open, and as much exposed

exposed to the Judgments of God, - as if they were perfectly stripp'd of whatever might promise them any Protection or Security in an evil Day. 'Tis true, Mens Riches, and Power, and Policy, and Interests, may help them to withstand many a Shock, and to weather out many a Storm: But when the Day comes which God hath set, and appointed for reckoning with them, then all these things in which they trust, shall afford them no Relief at all. It may be instead of relieving and protecting them, they may contribute to their Ruine. So we know God often curseth Mens Policies, and causeth the Wise to be taken *in their own Craftiness*, as *Eliphaz* speaks: And their Riches do them no other Service than only to make them a more desirable Prey to the Enemy. When the time comes that they are to be punished, in vain shall they hope to escape, whatever they have to protect and defend themselves withal, and to ward off those Evils that are coming upon them. The Prophet *Jeremiah* fore-telling, and prophetically describing the Overthrow of *Pharaoh's* Army, and all his hired Forces, by the Army of *Nebuchadnezzar*, and the sore Distress of *Egypt* attending that Overthrow, saith, *Her hired Men in the midst of her are like fatted Bullocks; for they are turned back, and are fled away together: they did not stand, because the Day of their Calamity was come upon them, and the time of their Visitation.* When the

Job 5. 13.

Jer. 46. 21.

- the time of Mens Calamity, and the Day of Mens Visitation is come, nothing shall help them or deliver them out of the Hands of God. This Insignificancy and Unavailableness of all Means for affording of Relief, God emphatically sets forth, when
- Ver. 11. speaking to *Egypt*, he saith, *Go up to Gilead, and take Balm, O Virgin, the Daughter of Egypt; in vain shalt thou use many Medicines, for thou shalt not be healed. I say therefore, make your Peace with God, and do it speedily before it be too late. Seek the Lord*
- Isa. 55. 6. *while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; as the Prophet exhorts. Seek him for the Pardon of your Sins; seek him for the averting of those Judgments which by your Sins you have deserved, and which are hanging over your Heads. To the same Effect is that Exhortation of the Prophet*
- Zeph. 2. 1, 2, 3. *Zephaniah; Gather your selves together; yea, gather together, O Nation not desired: before the Decree bring forth, before the Day pass as the Chaff; before the fierce Anger of the Lord come upon you, before the Day of the Lord's Anger come upon you. Seek ye the Lord all ye meek of the Earth, which have wrought his Judgments, seek Righteousness, seek Meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the Day of the Lord's Anger. If you be so hardy and obstinate as to resolve to go on in your Sins, whatever comes of it, then know that you will find*
- Heb. 10. 31. *in the End, that 'tis a fearful thing to fall into the Hands of the living God, as the Apo-*
stle

He speaks. And fall into his Hands you will, if you still go on to provoke him: Though he may have born long with you, though he may have exercised great Patience towards you, yet there will be an end of his Patience.

The

the speaks. And fall into his hands you
will, if you still go on to provoke him:
Though he may have born long with you,
though he may have exercised great Patience
towards you, yet there will be an end of his
Patience.

And now, my dear friends, let us
consider what we should do to
avoid the wrath of God. We should
be very careful not to provoke him
by our sins. We should be very
careful to keep his commandments,
that we may not be brought into
his hands. We should be very
careful to love him with all our
heart, mind, and strength, and
our neighbour as ourselves. We
should be very careful to be
merciful, kind, and lowly in
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The Eleventh Sermon

I

Now

Now followeth the fourth Particular, namely, the Effect which this severer Course had upon *Manasseh*; *When he was in Affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his Fathers, and prayed unto him.*

When he was in Affliction. A sore and heavy Affliction it was for a King to fall into the Hands of his Enemies that thirsted after his Blood, to be bound with Fetters, to be carried away captive into a strange Land, to be there a Prisoner standing in fear of his Life every day and every hour: This was such an Affliction as could not but deeply affect him, and go near his Heart. Now questionless he bitterly recounts and calls to mind what he enjoyed at home in his own Land, where he sat upon the Throne, and swayed the Scepter, and how lamentable a Change of his Condition he had tried to see. At length he looks beyond his Enemies, and takes notice of the Hand of God in all that had come upon him; and this brings to his Mind those his grievous Sins and horrid Crimes, by which in the time of his Prosperity he had provoked God to give him up into the Hands of his Enemies, and to bring upon him all that Misery under which he now smarted. Now he calls to mind how often God had by his Servants the Prophets called him to Repentance; how often he had been forewarned of all the Misery that he would bring upon himself, if he did not
by

by timely Repentance prevent it. Now he sadly remembers how wretchedly he had stopped his Ears, and hardned his Heart against good Counsels and Admonitions: And this at length sets him a praying, and humbling himself before God, which till this time he could never be perswaded to do. When God was pleased to correct and chasten him in this severe and extraordinary manner, then, and not till then, he began to think of returning unto God, from whom he had revolted. *When he was in Affliction, he besought the Lord his God.*

Hence we may observe,

That Afflictions will work upon Men, and prevail with them to return to God from whom they have gone astray, when all other Means are ineffectual.

For the right understanding of this Point, we must know, that Afflictions of themselves cannot effect this gracious Change in any Man. 'Tis not so much from any natural Property or inherent Virtue in Afflictions that they thus work, as it is from God who sanctifieth Afflictions, and makes them Means of spiritual Good to as many as he is pleased to work upon by them. If God be not pleased to sanctify Afflictions, and to accompany them with the effectual Operation of his Spirit upon the Hearts of Men, they are never the better for them, it may be they are much the worse; instead of being reduced from the Error of their Ways, and of being re-

claimed

2 Chron.

28. 22.

1 Sam. 18.

7, 8.

2 Kings

1. 2.

Rev. 16.

10, 11.

Prov. 27.

22.

claimed and brought home to God, they are driven farther away from him. So we read concerning *Abaz*, that in the time of his Distress he trespassed yet more against the Lord. Thus *Saul*, when in his Distress he should have had recourse unto God for Relief, he took himself to the Devil, and consulted with the Witch of *Endor*. The like did *Abaziah*, who in his Sickness, as if there had been no God in *Israel*, sent unto *Baalzebub* the God of *Ekron*, to enquire whether he should recover. Thus though the Judgments of God that had been inflicted on the Votaries and Adherents of Antichrist, were so terrible, that they gnawed their Tongues for Pain, yet they blasphemed the God of Heaven because of their Pains and their Sores, and repented not of their Deeds. And this is that which is confirmed by every Day's Experience: We see many wicked Men that are emptied from Vessel to Vessel, and harassed with all sorts of Afflictions; and yet they are as bad as ever they were; yea perhaps the more they are afflicted, the more are their Hearts estranged from God, and the more are they hardened in their Sins. How little Good is done upon wicked Men by Afflictions unless they be sanctified to them, *Solomon* informeth us, saying, *Though thou shouldst bray a Fool in a Mortar among Wheat with a Pestle, yet will not his Foolishness depart from him.* *Solomon's Fool* is a wicked Man, whose Foolishness is his Wickedness; this his Wickedness will not depart from him, though you bray

bray him with a Pestle in a Mortar; though you beat him, and bruise him, and even pound him to pieces, yet will he still be the same, every way as bad and as wicked as he was when you first took him in hand. Afflictions may batter him, bruise him, and break him; but without God's sanctifying Grace concurring and co-operating with them, they will never change a Man's Nature, or purge away his Corruption.

And here by the way, we may learn two things from hence.

In all our Afflictions, to look up to God, and beg of him that he would vouchsafe to sanctify them to us, without which we cannot expect to receive any Good by them. They may do us Hurt, but they can do us no Good; they may make us worse, but they cannot make us better without his Blessing. 'Tis easy to observe, what sad Work Afflictions, through the Corruption of Man's Nature, make, when they light upon wicked Men, and are not sanctified to them; how they repine, and fret, and murmur; how in the height of their Impatience they toss themselves like a wild Bull in a Net, as the Prophet expresseth it; how they oft-times blaspheme God, and fall foul upon Men who have been in God's Hand the Instruments of their Sufferings. Whoso considers this, cannot but think himself highly concerned to be an earnest Suitor unto God, that his Afflictions may be so sanctified to

him,

him, as that he may be enabled to make a holy Use and Improvement of them, and not be transported by them into those sinful Excesses, into which the Corruption of our Nature would hurry us.

2. We may also learn humbly and thankfully to acknowledge the Goodness of God to us; if we have received any Benefit by our Afflictions, to bless God for it, and to give him the Glory of it. Have our Afflictions brought us to the sight of our Sins? Have they humbled us? Have they reduced us from the Error of our Ways, and led us home to God? Let us not think these things to be the natural Issues and Fruits of Affliction. No such matter: 'tis God, and he alone that puts Efficacy into Afflictions for the production of these great and excellent things. Wherefore let us ascribe them not to the Means, but to God, and accordingly bless him for them.

But to return to the Point to be insisted on, Afflictions will work upon Men, and prevail with them to return to God from whom they have gone astray, when all other Means are ineffectual. Afflictions, if God be pleased to sanctify them, will do Men good when no other Means will. This Truth may be confirmed both from Scripture and Experience.

(1.) From Scripture it may be confirmed. David, when he was out of the way, wanted not other Means to reduce him, and to set him right again; but yet he acknowledgeth that

that Afflictions were the Means by which he was recalled from his Wandrings: *Before I* Psal 119. *was afflicted I went astray, but now I have kept thy Word.* And again, *It is good for me that I* Ver. 71. *was afflicted, that I might learn thy Statutes.* But next to the great Instance of the Efficacy of Afflictions this way in *Manasseh*, there is none other so full and pertinent, as that of the Prodigal Son. This wild young Man Luke 15. 11, 12, &c. could not be restrained, and kept in good Order by his Father's Instructions and Counsels. His Father's Discipline was too severe for him; his Father's House was little better than a Prison to him, a strait Confinement not to be endured, and such an Abridgment of his Liberty as was intolerable: Abroad he must, and take his Portion along with him also. Having withdrawn himself from under his Father's Government, and being at liberty, he prodigally and riotously spends all that he had, and reduceth himself to extreme Want and Misery. At length when he was ready to perish, and knew not what to do, he considers how much better it was with him while he was at home with his Father, and takes up Resolutions of returning to him, and of humbling himself before him. Here we see Afflictions and Misery works upon this Prodigal, and brings him home to his Father's House, when nothing else would reclaim him. And all this, what is it else but a lively Emblem of the Condition of a Sinner that is gone astray from God, and is reduced by Affliction, when nothing else will reclaim him?

(2.) This Truth may also be confirmed from Experience. We may observe, and 'tis no difficult matter to observe it, that when Men could not be reclaimed and taken off from their vicious Courses by any other Means, Afflictions have done it. Sometimes the Sense of God's Wrath, and Terrors of Conscience; sometimes a severe Fit of Sickness that hath brought them near the Grave, or some other sharp Affliction, hath imbittered that Sin to them, and taken off their Hearts from it, which before they could never be perswaded to part with. And there is no Man that hath any good Acquaintance with himself, and with his own Heart, and hath made any observation of God's Dealings with his Soul, but must have taken notice that Afflictions have been of that use to him, and have done him that Good in making a Separation between him and his Sins, which nothing else could ever do, neither the Word, nor all the Threatnings against Sin therein contained, nor the good Counsels and Admonitions of Friends, nor the Examples of the Judgments of God inflicted on others for the same Sins. When none of all these things will make a Man willing to leave his Sins, a Man's own proper Smart and personal Afflictions will do it.

Now if you ask, how God is pleased to make Afflictions the Means of reclaiming Sinners, and of bringing them home to himself when other Means will not do it?

I answer; Afflictions, when God is pleased to sanctify them, do many ways contribute towards the reclaiming of Sinners.

1. They make Men serious; they call in Mens Minds from the things of the World, from the Honours, the Profits, the Pleasures, the Divertisements and Vanities thereof; and make them reflect and consider how 'tis with them as to their spiritual Estate, and in what Condition their Souls are, and how Matters stand between God and them. These things are little minded while Men are in Prosperity, and they have no Changes; Men have other things to entertain themselves with, and to take up their Time and their Thoughts; they have things which they are better pleased with, and which they take more Content in. But in time of Affliction they retire into themselves, and are more conversant at home. The time of Adversity is a time of thinking, and of Consideration; *In the Day of Adversity consider,* saith Solomon. Eccl. 7. 14. Consideration is the proper Duty of that Time, and then a Man is fittest for it. Now Consideration, and serious Reflection on our selves, are the first Step towards our returning to God, and into the way of Obedience, when we have gone astray. *David thought* Psal. 119. *on his Ways, and then turned his Feet unto* 59. *God's Testimonies.* And 'tis said of the Prodigal when he was in Distress, that he came to himself, and said, *How many hired Servants* Luke 15. *of my Father's have Bread enough and to spare,* 17. *and I perish for Hunger?* He came to himself; before

before he was beside himself, he was abroad before: while his Portion and his Money lasted, he had other things to mind; but when all was spent, and when by his profuse, prodigal and luxurious Courses he had brought himself to those Extremities that he was ready to be famished, then he began to reflect upon himself, and to consider how foolishly he had done in forsaking his Father's House; what Misery he had thereby brought himself into; and how much happier he might have been if he had still kept at home with his Father, and never thought of rambling away from him. These and the like serious Reflections and Considerations at length produce the Resolutions which he takes up, saying with himself, *I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy Son; make me as one of thy hired Servants.* And so much concerning the first thing that Affliction doth towards the reclaiming of Sinners; it makes Men serious, it calls in their Minds from the World and the things thereof, and makes them reflect upon themselves and consider.

2. Afflictions bring Men to the Sight of their Sins, which is a further Step towards their reclaiming. The Affliction which God lays upon a Man is oft-times such as to its Kind, Nature and Circumstances, that it evidently points at a Man's Sin, and plainly shews the Sinner what the Sin

Sin is which God corrects him for. To make Men see and discern their Sins, and the better to convince them of their Sins, God often as it were writes the Sin upon the Punishment, and that in such fair and legible Characters as that all may read it, especially the Sinner himself, who is best acquainted with his own Sin, and so can best discern how exactly God futes the Punishment thereunto. A most famous and remarkable Instance hereof we have in *Adonibezek*; who having cut off the Thumbs and great Toes of threescore and ten Kings, had at length his own Thumbs and great Toes cut off, which made him acknowledge the righteous Judgment of God herein, saying, *As I have done, so God hath requited me.* But though Afflictions be not such as evidently point at the Sin, and presently make Men see it, and acknowledge it, whether they will or no; yet do they conduce to the bringing of us to the Sight of our Sins divers Ways.


Judg. i.
6, 7.

1st. Afflictions make Men sensible of God's Displeasure: When they are afflicted, they apprehend God to be angry with them, though perhaps they cannot see what it is by which they have provoked him: They say within themselves, Surely God is much displeased with us, or else such or such an Affliction had never befallen us.

2^{dly}. This makes them search and inquire after the Cause of their Afflictions, the Sins by

by which God hath been so much provoked to Displeasure against them. This is a Work that Men take little Content in; 'tis a Work which they are most averse from. Men care not how little and how seldom they look in to themselves; they had much rather be abroad than at home. But however Afflictions put them upon this unacceptable Work. Search after their Sins they will, rather than still smart under the Hand of God that afflicts them.

3dly. Afflictions make Men willing to find out their Sins, and they make them search after their Sins as those that have a Mind to find them. Men feeling the Smart of the Rod, and earnestly desiring to be freed from it, and to be at Ease, will search after their Sins narrowly and diligently, they will *search after them with all their Hearts*; as the Prophet speaks in another Case; they will search after them with an earnest Desire to find them, and never be at rest till they do find them, because they know till then they may not hope to be freed from their Afflictions.

4thly. Afflictions do also open Mens Eyes to see that which before they could not or would not see. Men are not willing to see  they willingly overlook them, or shut their Eyes that they may not see them. Afflictions make them see and acknowledge those their Errors and Miscarriages which they would never be convinced of, or acknowledge till the Hand of God was upon them. The Child that is corrected, will confess and

and acknowledge his Faults under the Rod, which he would never own or acknowledge before. When *David* commanded the People to be numbred, he saw not, or would not see the Evil of that Action, though *Joab* and the Captains of the Host saw it, and utterly disliked the thing: And as for *Joab*, though he was none of the best Men otherwise, yet 'tis said of him, that *the Word of the King was abominable to him*. But whatever *Joab* and the Captains of the Host thought of this Action, *David* was resolute, and would have it done, and his Word prevailed against *Joab*, and against the Captains of the Host, as we read in the Place before-mentioned. Thus far *David* would not be convinced of the Sinfulness of his commanding the People to be numbred: But afterwards when his Heart had smitten him, and especially after that seventy thousand of his People had been swept away by the Pestilence, then he saw his Miscarriage, and cried out, *I have sinned, and I have done wickedly; but these Sheep, what have they done? Let thy Hand be against me, and against my Father's House*. Thus we have seen how Afflictions are Means of bringing Men to the Sight of their Sins, and how many ways they conduce thereto.

4. By Afflictions Men come to be acquainted with the Evil, the hainous Nature and Danger of Sin. Before the Sinner is afflicted, he makes light of Sin, he thinks there is no great Evil or Danger in those Sins which he indulgeth himself in. But when

God

2 Sam.

24. 4.

1 Chron.

21. 6.

Ver. 10.

Ver. 17.

God severely corrects him for those things which he looked upon as small Matters, and very pardonable Offences, such venial Sins as he thinks no Man need question but that they are pardoned in Course, and remitted as often and as easily as committed; I say, when God severely corrects him for those things, then he begins to have other Thoughts of them; then he understands that there is much more Evil and Malignity in them than he was aware of; then he begins to be sensible of the Danger of allowing himself in them. Thus by Afflictions God rectifies his Judgment, and corrects his Errors and Mistakes about the Nature and Danger of Sin.

The unclean Person as long as he escapes unpunished, is apt to think he may safely enough gratify his Lust by addicting himself to that abominable Sin: But when he feels that his Bones are full of the Sins of his Youth, when he hath brought upon himself those Infirmities and Diseases, those exquisite and tormenting Pains which are the natural Attendants and proper Fruits of that Sin; then he begins to understand that there is much more Evil and Danger in that Sin than he was apprehensive of.

So the Drunkard is apt to think there is little Evil or Danger in that Excess which he often indulgeth himself in; but when he finds that he hath thereby ruined himself and his distressed Family, and that he hath brought both himself, and such as depend on him, to a Morsel of Bread; and moreover, that
he

he hath overthrown the State of his Body; impaired his Health, wasted his Strength, consumed up in his declining and half-rotten Carcase, Matter for all manner of Diseases, and extinguished natural Heat, and even drownded Nature by the continual Droppings of his Excess; and by all this brought himself to the brink of the Pit; when at length he becomes sensible of the great Evil, and dreadful Consequents of his intemperate Carcase; then he cries out against himself, that he should ever be such a Beast as he has been; that he should by his Excess ruine his Family, and destroy himself both Soul and Body. In short, Afflictions are a kind of spiritual Eye-salve whereby our Sight is cleared, and we are enabled to see what we saw not before we were afflicted; and to see those things more clearly and distinctly, which before we saw darkly and confusedly. Afflictions help us to see those Sins in our lives which before we discerned not; or if we had some obscure and imperfect Sight of them, if we had a dark and confused View of them before we were afflicted, our Afflictions help us to see them, and to discern the Evil and Danger of them more clearly.

Afflictions put us upon the great and necessary Duties of Humiliation and Prayer. Afflictions make us humble our selves for our Sin, by which we have brought our Afflictions upon us; and they make us earnest Suitors to God in Prayer for the Pardon of
our

our Sins, and for the Redemption of our
 Souls, we have been made partakers of
 his Grace, and his Mercy, and his Love,
 and his Goodness, and his Kindness, and
 his Compassion, and his Tender Mercies,
 and his Faithfulness, and his Steadfastness,
 and his Unchangeableness, and his
 Everlastingness, and his Immortality,
 and his Glory, and his Honour, and his
 Majesty, and his Power, and his Might,
 and his Strength, and his Vigour, and his
 Energy, and his Force, and his Influence,
 and his Dominion, and his Sovereignty,
 and his Lordship, and his Authority,
 and his Supremacy, and his Pre-eminence,
 and his Primacy, and his Precedence,
 and his Priority, and his Priority,

Psal. 107.
 25, 26, 27,
 28.

Forasmuch as the Lord God is
 merciful, and his Mercy is
 everlasting, and his Goodness
 is unchangeable, and his
 Kindness is steadfast, and his
 Compassion is tender, and his
 Faithfulness is true, and his
 Steadfastness is firm, and his
 Unchangeableness is constant,
 and his Everlastingness is perpetual,
 and his Immortality is eternal,
 and his Glory is glorious, and his
 Honour is honourable, and his
 Majesty is majestic, and his
 Power is powerful, and his Might
 is mighty, and his Strength is strong,
 and his Vigour is vigorous, and his
 Energy is energetic, and his Force
 is forceful, and his Influence is influential,
 and his Dominion is dominant, and his
 Sovereignty is sovereign, and his
 Lordship is lordly, and his Authority
 is authoritative, and his Supremacy
 is supreme, and his Pre-eminence
 is pre-eminent, and his Primacy
 is primary, and his Precedence
 is pre-cedent, and his Priority
 is prior.

Isa. 26. 16.

Forasmuch as the Lord God is
 merciful, and his Mercy is
 everlasting, and his Goodness
 is unchangeable, and his
 Kindness is steadfast, and his
 Compassion is tender, and his
 Faithfulness is true, and his
 Steadfastness is firm, and his
 Unchangeableness is constant,
 and his Everlastingness is perpetual,
 and his Immortality is eternal,
 and his Glory is glorious, and his
 Honour is honourable, and his
 Majesty is majestic, and his
 Power is powerful, and his Might
 is mighty, and his Strength is strong,
 and his Vigour is vigorous, and his
 Energy is energetic, and his Force
 is forceful, and his Influence is influential,
 and his Dominion is dominant, and his
 Sovereignty is sovereign, and his
 Lordship is lordly, and his Authority
 is authoritative, and his Supremacy
 is supreme, and his Pre-eminence
 is pre-eminent, and his Primacy
 is primary, and his Precedence
 is pre-cedent, and his Priority
 is prior.

Hof. 5. 15.

Forasmuch as the Lord God is
 merciful, and his Mercy is
 everlasting, and his Goodness
 is unchangeable, and his
 Kindness is steadfast, and his
 Compassion is tender, and his
 Faithfulness is true, and his
 Steadfastness is firm, and his
 Unchangeableness is constant,
 and his Everlastingness is perpetual,
 and his Immortality is eternal,
 and his Glory is glorious, and his
 Honour is honourable, and his
 Majesty is majestic, and his
 Power is powerful, and his Might
 is mighty, and his Strength is strong,
 and his Vigour is vigorous, and his
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 is supreme, and his Pre-eminence
 is pre-eminent, and his Primacy
 is primary, and his Precedence
 is pre-cedent, and his Priority
 is prior.

unto him. This Course St. James directs the Afflicted unto: *Is any among you afflicted? let him pray.* Jam. 5. 13. To the like purpose is the Exhortation of St. Peter to such as are cast down under the afflicting Hand of God; *Humble your selves under the mighty Hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.* 1 Pet. 5. 6.

5. Afflictions make Men willing to forsake their Sins, and induce them to take up Resolutions to forsake them, and cast them off. The beloved Sins of Men are sweet to them, and they are most unwilling to leave them as long as they can enjoy them without Trouble or Molestation, as long as they suffer nothing, and as they smart not upon the account of their Sins: But when they are chastened and afflicted for their Sins, this makes Sin bitter to them, and makes them resolve to part with it, to cast it off, and abandon it; this makes them bind and oblige themselves by the most solemn and sacred Bonds never to return to it any more. This is that which God's People were to do in the time of their Affliction; they must resolve upon other Courses, they must promise and vow to renounce and forsake those Sins by which they had drawn down the Judgments of God upon them; they must return to the Lord, and say unto him, *Asker shall not save us; we will not ride upon Horses, neither will we say any more to the Works of our hands, Ye are our Gods.* Hos. 14. 3. These Resolutions, their Afflictions should produce, and such Resolutions they would produce, when their Sufferings, being sanctified

fied to them, should effectually reduce them, and bring them home to God. And the like Resolutions did *David's Afflictions* produce in him, as we may gather from the frequent mention there is of the Vows which he then made unto God: *Thy Vows are upon me, O God: I will render Praise unto thee, Psal. 56. 12. Thou, O God, hast heard my Vows, Psal. 61. 5. Prepare Mercy and Truth, which may preserve me: So will I sing Praise unto thee for ever, that I may daily perform my Vows, ver. 7, 8. I will pay thee my Vows which my Lips have uttered, and my Mouth hath spoken when I was in Trouble, Psal. 66. 13, 14.* Now by these his Vows, no doubt but he obliged himself to testify his Thankfulness unto God when he should deliver him out of his Troubles, not only by offering Sacrifices, which were the usual Testifications of Thankfulness in those times, but also by a more careful Endeavour to forsake all Sin, and to give up himself to God more intirely in a way of constant and universal Obedience, without which all his Sacrifices and Oblations had in God's Account signified little.

The Sum of all that hath been spoken, is this: Afflictions will work upon Men, and prevail with them to return to God from whom they have gone astray, when all other Means are ineffectual. That 'tis not from any natural Property or inherent Virtue in Afflictions themselves that they produce this Effect, but from the Grace of God, and the Operation

Operation of his Spirit accompanying Afflictions, and sanctifying them to us. That Afflictions, sanctified Afflictions, contribute towards the reclaiming of Sinners. (1.) By making them more serious, and by causing them to reflect upon themselves, and consider. (2.) By bringing them to the sight of their Sins, which they do several ways. (3.) By acquainting them with the great Evil and Heinousness of Sin, and with the Danger thereof. (4.) By putting the Sinner upon Humiliation and Prayer. (5.) By making him willing to forsake his Sins, and by causing him to take up Resolutions to forsake his Sins, and never to return to them any more.

Now I come to apply what hath been spoken.

Life 1. If Afflictions will work upon Men, and prevail with them to return to God, when all other Means are ineffectual; this may inform us how extremely bad we are, what sinful Natures we have; how disingenuous we are, how much our Hearts are set upon Sin, and how fondly in love with it we are. 'Tis a very bad Child, that will be wrought upon and be made better by nothing but the Rod: if no Perswasions, no wholesome Counsels, no Admonitions, no Promises, no Threatnings will do him any good; if he must be beaten and smart soundly, or he will miscarry and undo himself. This is our natural Temper, this is the very Case of us all

by Nature; nothing but Blows and the Smart of the Rod will take off our Hearts from Sin, and make us willing to leave it. How should it humble and abase us, and cause us even to loath our selves, that we should have such wicked and vile Natures, that we should be so disingenuous; and that there should be such a cursed League between us and Sin; that we should have so much Kindness and intire Friendship and Affection for Sin, which is most odious to God, and most destructive to our own Souls!

Use 2. If Afflictions will work upon Men, and prevail with them to return to God from whom they have gone astray, when all other Means are ineffectual; this should reconcile us to Afflictions, and make us willing to submit to that Spiritual Discipline which the most wise God thinks fit to train us up under for our Good. Why should you murmur and fret against the Lord, when his chastning Hand is upon you? Why should your Heart rise against that wholsom and necessary Severity, which he makes use of for reclaiming you? Is there not a Cause? Doth he not see that nothing else will prevail with you? What would you have him do? Would you have him let you alone, and suffer you to perish in your Sins? Be not so in love with your present Ease, as to be unwilling to suffer a little here, to prevent your suffering eternally in another World. Be not so fondly, foolishly, irrationally, and madly in love with

with Sin, as to be averſe from undergoing any thing whereby you may be delivered from the Power and Dominion of it. Have not ſuch mean, low and unworthy Thoughts of the great and ineſtimable Mercy of being reduced from the Error of your Ways, and brought home unto God, as to think much of any Severity by which it may be effected. Certainly if you judge Sin to be the greateſt Evil, and if you be really of the mind that 'tis the greateſt Happineſs to be freed from it, and to be at Peace with God, and to be reconciled to him, you will not think any Courſe harſh, grievous and intolerable, whereby it may be attained.

I come now to a more particular Conſideration of what *Manaſſeh* did in his Affliction; *He beſought the Lord his God, and humbled himſelf greatly before the God of his Fathers, and prayed unto him.*

In which Words we are informed what *Manaſſeh* did: Firſt, in general Terms, *He beſought the Lord his God*; and then we are more particularly informed how he ſought him, namely, by Humiliation and Prayer; *He humbled himſelf greatly before the God of his Fathers, and he prayed unto him.*

Concerning the Account in general of what *Manaſſeh* did, in thoſe words, *He beſought the Lord his God*, I ſhall ſay nothing, becauſe there is nothing in thoſe general Terms, but what is comprehended in the following

lowing Particulars, namely, *that he humbled himself greatly before the God of his Fathers, and prayed unto him.*

First, *He humbled himself greatly before the God of his Fathers.* In which Words there are three things considerable: *That he humbled himself: That he humbled himself greatly; and that he humbled himself greatly before the God of his Fathers.*

1st. *He humbled himself.* But when was it that he humbled himself? It was when God had first humbled him, and not till then; when God had delivered him into the Hands of his Enemies; when God had caused him to be carried away captive to Babylon, made him a Prisoner, and put him in durance there, from whence he knew not whether he should ever be released, and set at liberty again. Whence we may observe, *That proud, stubborn and incorrigible Sinners will not humble themselves till God hath humbled them, till by Afflictions he hath taken down their haughty Spirits, and laid them low.* Wherefore you who turn the deaf Ear to all God's gracious Calls and Invitations to Repentance, and to all his severe Denunciations of Judgments, would you prevent God's humbling you by those sharp and heavy Afflictions, which would be very grievous to you? then humble yourselves betimes, before he takes you in Hand to humble you. This is the best Course, or rather the only Course that you can take for preventing God's humbling

bling you: for if we would judge our selves, I Cor. II.
we should not be judged. When Manasseh lay 31.
under God's afflicting Hand, then he hum-
bled himself. The Time of Affliction is
the most proper Season for Humiliation.

1. Then, if ever, we see our Sins; our
Afflictions open our Eyes, make us look about
us, and help us to discover those our Miscar-
riages, which before we would not own nor
take notice of.

2. Then the Heart is softened, and touched
with the sense of our Sins.

3. Then also the Sinner begins to have a
sense of God's Displeasure against him for his
Sins: By the Afflictions which the Hand of
God hath laid upon him, he perceives that
God is angry with him, which he was not
in the least sensible of before he was afflicted.
Now all these things do not a little further
our Humiliation.

Use. Let us therefore when Afflictions
come upon us, improve that Season for our
Humiliation; else all those Advantages will
be lost.

Now if you ask how we are to be active
in humbling our selves? I answer,

1. By making diligent search after our
Sins, by labouring to find them out, and
acquaint our selves with them: And this is
no easy Work, considering our natural
Blindness in spiritual things, our Unwilling-
ness to know the worst of our selves, our

Partiality to our selves, and our Aptness to overlook our Sins.

2. By using our best Endeavours to affect our Hearts with our Sins, which is to be done by a serious Consideration of the Nature, Quality and Aggravations of our Sins; as also of the extreme Danger attending them, and of the dismal Consequents of Sin unrepented of, and the most fearful and eternal Wrath of God which it unavoidably exposeth the Sinner unto.

3. By humble and affectionate Confession of our Sins unto God, with our most earnest and importunate Supplications to him for the pardon and forgiveness of them.

4. By judging our selves for them, and by passing Sentence against our selves, as those who have by our Provocations deserved to be disowned and cast off for ever, and to be made the miserable Objects of God's fierce Indignation to Eternity.

5. By taking up the most firm and steadfast Resolutions to cast off all our Transgressions for the time to come, and as far as God shall be pleased by his Grace to enable us, never to return to Folly any more.

Now followeth the second Particular, *He humbled himself greatly*, as he had been a very great and most heinous Sinner. And hence we may farther observe,

That our Humiliation must be proportionable to the Nature and Quality of our Sins.

A little

A little slight Humiliation for great and grievous Sins, is in God's account next to no Humiliation at all. Let not therefore such as have been guilty of great and horrid Sins, think it is enough for them to have *bang'd down their Heads as a Bulrush for a day or two*; as those Hypocrites whose Carriage the Prophet describes, *Jer. 58. 5.* or to have made some slight and formal Confession of their Sins, when they are now just ready to go out of the World. This forced and half-Humiliation cannot be acceptable to God; for it argues that such a Man hath neither any true sense of the Heinousness of his Sins, nor of the high Displeasure of God against him for his Sins, much less any sincere and firm Resolutions to forsake his Sins, if God should raise him up again, and lengthen out his Life for some longer time. That you may be duly and soundly humbled for your Sins,

1. Give your self no Rest until you be fully convinced of the heinous Nature of your Sins, and the various Aggravations of them by which they have been heightened: As,

(1.) That your Sins have been so often repeated, renewed, and acted over again and again.

(2.) That they have been committed against so many Cautions against them as you have had; against so many Warnings, so many Admonitions and Reproofs.

(3.) A-

(3.) Against so many Chastisements, and so much Experience of the bitter Fruits of Sin.

(4.) Against so many Mercies which should have led you to Repentance.

(5.) That they have been committed against so many Purposes and Resolutions, against so many Promises and serious Engagements to the contrary, and perhaps against so many solemn Vows and Covenants.

2. Acquaint your self with the Threatnings of God against those your Sins, and the high Displeasure of God therein manifested against you for them.

Ezek. 36.
26.

3. Be an humble Suitor unto God, that he would be pleased to break your Heart, and according to his Promise, *to take away your stony Heart, and give you a Heart of Flesh.* But be sure that you be in good earnest when you offer up this Suit unto God; beg this Mercy with the greatest Importunity, or otherways never expect to obtain it; then, and then only shall you seek God and find him, when you shall *search for him with all your Heart.* And though you should not presently obtain what you seek unto God for, yet give not over seeking him; if you seek him with Constancy and Perseverance, you shall be sure to speed in the End: *In due time you shall reap, if you faint not.*

Jer. 29. 13.

Gal. 6. 9.

But you will say, How may a Man know that he is truly and soundly humbled, that his Humiliation bears some Proportion with the Quality and Degree of his Sins?

Ans. I.

Ans. 1. He that is truly, effectually and soundly humbled, will loath and abhor himself for his Sins; so did Job: *Behold, I am vile,* saith he, *what shall I answer thee? I will lay my Hand upon my Mouth.* And again, *I labour myself,* saith he, *and repent in Dust and Ashes.* Job 40. 4.
Ch. 42. 6.

This is that Frame of Spirit which God expects should be found in a sincerely penitent, truly humbled, and effectually reformed People; they should remember and be confounded, and never open their Mouth any more that is, Ezek. 16. 63.

they should remember all their Abominations, be confounded in the serious Thoughts and Remembrance of them, and never open their Mouth any more to justify themselves. 8. 7. 8. 8.

2. He that is truly, effectually, and soundly humbled, will freely acknowledge and aggravate his Sins; he will be so far from extenuating and lessening his Sins, that he will lay them open, and represent them as fully as he can, and in his Confessions of them lay all the load on himself that he is able; he will not spare himself, nor in the least favour himself in the Charge and Indictment which he brings in against himself. Thus David making Acknowledgment of his Sin, gives it its full Aggravations, saying, *I have sinned greatly, and I have done very foolishly.* 2 Sam. 24. 10. And afterwards, when he saw the Angel of the Lord stretching out his Hand against the People, *Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but as for these Sheep, what have they done? Let thy Hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my Father's House.* Ver. 17.

House. An unhumbled Sinner would have shifted off all the Blame upon others, as did *Saul*, *Sam. 15. 15.* excusing himself, he pleaded, that *the People had spared the best of the Sheep, and the Oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lord*: But *David* took all the Blame upon himself, and wholly exempts his People from it.

3. The Sinner that is truly, effectually, and soundly humbled, will justify God in all that is come upon him for his Sins: So *Daniel* acknowledging his own Sins, and the Sins of the People, saith, *To thee, O Lord, belongeth Righteousness; but to us Confusion of face, to our Kings, to our Princes, and to our Fathers, because we have sinned against thee.* This Acknowledgment he makes after a long Recital of those heavy Judgments which for their Sins God had inflicted on them, thereby clearing him from any unjust Severity which he had exercised upon them. To the same purpose it is that *Extra* making Confession of his own Sins, and of the Sins of that People, freely acknowledged, that though they had suffered grievous things, yet they had been punished less than their Iniquities deserved. God had in Wrath remembered Mercy, even when he treated them with most Severity.

Ezra 9. 13.

4. The Sinner that is truly, effectually, and soundly humbled, will meekly and patiently submit to God's Corrections, and lay himself at the Feet of God while he is chastning him. He will accept of the Punishment of his Sin, as the Phrase is, *Lev. 26. 41.* He will

The Eleventh Sermon.

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will cordially say with the Church; *I will bear Mich.7.9*
the Indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned
against him. He will humbly say with *Eli*,
whatsoever his Sufferings are, It is the Lord
that thus handles me; It is the Lord, let him 1 Sam. 3.
do what seemeth him good. In like manner 18.
David expresseth his humble Submission to
the good Pleasure of God, when he lay un-
der his correcting Hand; when he fled from
Abſalom, he ordered the Ark to be by *Zadok*
carried back into the City, saying, *If I shall* 2 Sam. 15.
find favour in the Eyes of the Lord, he will bring 25, 26.
me again, and shew me both it, and his Habita-
tion: But if he thus say, I have no Delight in
thee; behold, here am I, let him do to me as seem-
eth good unto him.

5. The Sinner that is truly, effectually, and
soundly troubled, will take a holy Revenge
upon himself, in reference to those things,
to those particular Instances of his Life, in
which he has most provoked God and incur- 2 Cor. 7. 11.
red his Displeasure. To manifest his Indig-
nation against himself for the Sins by which
he hath most highly dishonoured God, he
will deny himself some of those lawful and
innocent Liberties which he might otherways
without Sin make use of.

The

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2 CHRON. 33-10, 11, 12, 13.

And the Lord spake to Manasseh, and to his People: but they would not hearken. Wherefore the Lord brought upon them the Captains of the Host of the King of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the Thorns, and bound him with Fetters, and carried him to Babylon.

And when he was in Affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his Fathers, And prayed unto him, and he was intreated of him, and heard his Supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his Kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God.

IT now follows in the Text, that he humbled himself greatly before the God of his Fathers. Which Words may imply either an Aggravation of his Sins, or an Incouragement to seek unto God for the Pardon of his Sins.

i. The

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1. The Words may imply an Aggravation of his Sins, which had been committed against so many Considerations as might and should have effectually refrained him from sinning against God in such a fearful manner as he had done.

As, 1st. That he had sinned against so many good Instructions and Cautions again Sin, as his Father had given him; and against the pious Education which under the Care and Inspection of so religious and conscientious a Father he had enjoyed.

2^{dly}. That he had sinned against all the good Examples which his Father and other religious Progenitors had given him, and against all the Patterns of sincere Godliness and true Piety which they had laid before him, and either were or should have been still in his Eye.

3^{dly}. That he had sinned at such a fearful rate, and indulged himself in such vile and profligate Courses, against all the Advantages, for better things, which all the Prayers of his Father and other godly Ancestors had afforded him.

Use. Let all wicked and graceless Children of pious and religious Parents, consider seriously how sad their Account must needs be another Day, if they shall still go on and persevere in those wicked and ungodly ways unto which they addict themselves; they must not think to plead the Piety of their religious Parents and other Ancestors; this shall

shall be so far from being any Advantage to them, that it will be found to be the greatest Aggravation of their Sins, and accordingly procure the most fearful Aggravation and Heightning of their Punishment. The most wicked Children are apt to please and flatter themselves with this fond Imagination, that being descended from such good Parents and Ancestors, they shall for their sakes find Favour with God at the Great Day of their Account; and that the Children of such Parents and Ancestors, though they should have lived irregularly, cannot easily miscarry and perish everlastingly. Let not wicked Children of good Parents deceive themselves; if they continue and persevere still in their evil ways, they must know (and I desire all such to ponder it seriously) that the Piety of their Parents will be of no other Advantage to them, than only to rise up in Judgment against them, and to condemn them with a more sore and dreadful Condemnation. *John* the Baptist calling upon the Ungodly to break off their wicked Practices, and to bring forth Fruits meet for Repentance, tells them, that they must not think to say within themselves, *We have Abraham to our Father; for God was able even of Stones to raise up Children unto Abraham. Abraham wanted no such Children as they were, Children that were a Dishonour and a Reproach to their godly Ancestors: Abraham would never own such a wicked Posterity for his Children, much less would he open his Mouth to speak one Word in their*

X Behalf

Mat. 3. 9.

Behalf when they should stand before the Judgment-seat of Christ, to be accountable to him for all their Wickedness. The true and genuine Children of *Abraham* are only those who imitate *Abraham*, and tread in his Steps; as for others he will utterly disown and disclaim them. And the same Treatment must all wicked Children, still continuing so to be, expect from their godly Parents and Ancestors; they must not think to shelter themselves from the Judgments of God, under the Piety of their Progenitors.

2. The Words may imply an Encouragement to seek unto God for the Pardon of his Sins; and a great Encouragement thereunto it is upon several Accounts. For,

1st. The Children of good Men are, together with their Parents, within the Compass of the Covenant which God makes and establisheth with his People: Thus runs the Gen. 17. 7. Tenour of that Covenant; *I will establish my Covenant (saith the Lord to Abraham) betwixt me and thee, and thy Seed after thee in their Generations, for an everlasting Covenant, to be a God to thee, and to thy Seed after thee.* By this St. Peter encourageth the wicked *Jews* that had stained their Hands with the horrid Guilt of crucifying the Lord of Life: I say, by this he encouraged them to Repentance for the Remission of their Sins; For the Promise is unto you, and to your Children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

Acts 2. 39.

2^{ly}. Godly

27. Godly Parents make Conscience of praying for their Children, that God would be pleased to pardon their Sins, to strengthen them against their Temptations, and to bestow his Grace and holy Spirit upon them. This Consideration, if duly weighed, must needs be a singular Encouragement, even to the most wicked and ungodly Children, to become humble and earnest Suitors unto God for the Pardon of their Sins: they may upon good Grounds hope, that all the Prayers and supplications which their Parents have offered up unto God for them, shall not utterly miscarry and be lost.

Use 1. This may inform us how great a Mercy it is for Children to have been descended from pious and religious Parents, and how thankful unto God they ought to be for this singular Favour, a Favour that cannot be sufficiently valued, and which hath its rise purely from the free Grace of God, which alone maketh one Man to differ from another, especially in Matters of this Nature, wherein the eternal Welfare of our Souls is so nearly concerned.

Use 2. Let all such Children who have been favoured with this inestimable Privilege of being descended from religious Parents, improve this Mercy to their spiritual Advantage, giving all Diligence to become Followers of their Parents, and Imitators of their Piety; to write after that Copy, and

to work after that Pattern which their Parents have set them: And let them pray unto God fervently and incessantly, that they may by a holy and unblameable Conversation, approve themselves to be the true Offspring of such Parents, and be accordingly owned and acknowledged by them; and above all, that they may be owned and acknowledged of God for such, when they shall give up their Accounts to him, and receive their final Sentence *according to what they have done, in the Flesh, whether it be Good or Evil.* And thus I have done with that Observation.

2 Cor. 5. 10.

The next thing to be considered, is, what *Manasseh* joined with his Humiliation under the afflicting Hand of God, namely, Prayer; *He humbled himself greatly before the God of his Fathers, and prayed unto him.*

Whence we may observe, in the next place, that Prayer is a seasonable and necessary Duty in the time of Affliction. *Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Call upon me in the Day of Trouble.* This God aims at in afflicting us, and hiding his Face from us: This is his Design in withdrawing his gracious Presence from us: *I will go and return to my Place, saith he, till they acknowledge their Offence, and seek my Face: in their Affliction they will seek me early.* Thus did God's People in the time of their Afflictions: Lord, (saith the Prophet) *in Trouble they have visited thee: they poured out a Prayer, when thy Chastning was upon them.*

Jam. 5. 13.

Psal. 50.

15.

Hos. 5. 15.

Isa. 26. 16.

And

And divers Reasons there are why all God's People should in their Afflictions betake themselves to God by Prayer. As,

1. All Afflictions come from God; *I form* Isa. 45. 7. *Light, saith he, and create Darkneſs: I make Peace, and create Evil; I the Lord do all theſe things. Shall there be Evil in the City, and the Lord hath not done it?* Amos 3. 6. Which Words muſt be underſtood of the Evil of Affliction and Punishment, not of the Evil of Sin, that's an Evil whereof God who is perfectly and infinitely Good, can never be the Author. Men may be Instruments in our Sufferings, they may be Actors in ſubjecting us to Afflictions, and in bringing ſuch Evils upon us; but it is God that employs them, and makes uſe of them to chaſtiſe his People for their Sins. This is that which the Pſalmiſt intends when he calls wicked Men *God's Sword*; *Deliver my Soul from the Wicked, ſaith he, which is thy Sword*: The Sword wherewith he thruſts at, wounds and pierceth, chaſtiſes and corrects his People, when they have by their Provocations incurred his Diſpleaſure. To the ſame purpoſe it is that he calls *Aſſyria* the Rod of his Anger, *Iſa. 10. 5.* and the Staff in their Hand his Indignation; that is, the Instrument of his Indignation which he makes uſe of to puniſh them for their Sins. Hence alſo it is that he calls the *Babylonians* his *Battel-Axe*, *Jer. 51. 20.* and *Weapons of War*, with which he breaks in pieces the Nations, and deſtroys their Kingdoms,

2. Because God only can remove those Afflictions from his People, which his Hand hath laid upon them: This God assumes to himself as his own Prerogative; *I kill* (saith he) *and I make alive; I wound, and I heal; neither is there any that can deliver out of my Hand.* To the same Effect is that Passage in the Song of Hannah, where she saith, *The Lord killeth and maketh alive; he bringeth down to the Grave, and bringeth up.* And that of Psal. 68. 20. *Unto God the Lord belong the Issues from Death.* Hence God himself complains of Mens neglecting to have Recourse to him by Prayer in their Afflictions, who alone can relieve them by removing his afflicting Hand from them; saying, *The People turneth not to him that smiteth them; neither do they seek the Lord of Hosts.*

3. Our Neglect to have Recourse to God by Prayer in our Afflictions, blasteth all other Means which we make use of for our Relief. No Question can be made of it, but that *Abaziah* having taken a dangerous Fall from a Lattice, made use of all the best Means that could be had for his Cure; but because in that his Affliction he sought not unto the true God, the God of *Israel*, for healing, but unto the God of *Ekron*, the Prophet in the Name of God tells him, that he should not come down from that Bed on which he had gone up, but should surely die, as accordingly it fell out in the Issue. Wherefore this is noted as a great Miscarriage in *Asa* (though otherwise a good Man) that in his Disease,

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Disease, even when it was very grievous, ^{2 Chron.} he sought unto the Physicians, and not unto ^{16. 12.} God.

It concerns us in our Afflictions to seek unto God by Prayer, in regard of the great need we have of his Help and Assistance many other ways in the time of our Afflictions. As,

1st. To teach us his meaning in those Afflictions with which he exerciseth us; what he designs in them; and what at such a time he expects from us.

2^{dly}. To sanctify Afflictions to us, and to enable us to improve them to our spiritual Advantage.

3^{dly}. To support us under our Afflictions.

4^{thly}. To give us Patience under his afflicting Hand, and to keep us from murmuring, repining, discontent, fretting against God, and all other sinful Distempers, which in regard of the Corruption of our Nature, and the evil Frame of our Hearts, we are subject unto in our Afflictions.

These Particulars I have only mentioned, leaving it to every Man to enlarge on them in his private Meditations, as he shall see cause.

Use. Seeing we are upon so many Considerations obliged and highly concerned to seek unto God in our Afflictions, let us all be cautioned to take heed that we neglect not the Duty of Prayer while God's afflicting Hand is upon us, and when, if ever,

this Duty is both most seasonable and most necessary. As soon as ever any Affliction from the Hand of God begins to light on us, let us immediately betake our selves unto God by Prayer; let this be the first thing we do, and let us never think of making use of any other means in order to our Relief, till this be done: neither let us rest here, but let us continue to pray without ceasing, as long as God thinks good to continue his afflicting Hand upon us and ours. Thus doing with Constancy and Perseverance, we need not question but that we shall see a good Issue out of our Afflictions, whatever they be, in God's appointed time; but in all our Afflictions, let us not only pray, but labour to be soundly humbled for our Sins, which have been the meritorious Cause of all our Sufferings; let us earnestly beg the Pardon of them, and Strength against them for the future. This is the best Course that we can take in our Afflictions, and the only Course that can give us any Security, that we shall be in due time delivered out of our Afflictions, and be delivered with such Advantages to our Souls, as shall give us just Cause to acknowledge that it hath been good for us to have been afflicted; and that God hath in Faithfulness chastised us, as *David*, after his Afflictions, professed and acknowledged; *Psal. 119. 75.*

Now follows the fifth Particular, namely, the Issue of *Manasseh's* Prayer; God was intreated of him, and heard his Supplication, and brought

brought him again to Jerusalem into his Kingdom. This Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God. Most sad and doleful was the Condition of Manasseh, while he was a Captive in Babylon, he was bound with Chains, and fettered with Irons; he was confined to the dark and uncomfortable Vaults and Cloysters of a Prison; and though perhaps in regard that he was not of the common sort of Prisoners, but a King, he might have better Accommodations than many others; yet which was worst of all, he had small or no Hopes of being ever released or set at Liberty again; and which was the Height of his Misery, he had no Security for his Life, but was perpetually in Danger, and upon that Account under Fears of being drawn out of Prison, and brought to Execution every Day and every Hour. This was his dismal and desperate Condition, than which nothing could easily be more sad and rueful; but notwithstanding all this, God wonderfully appeared for him, and rescued him out of his Misery.

And hence we may observe;

That there is no Condition so sad, so disconsolate, and so dismal, but that God can afford a Man Relief therein, and will do it if he be duly sought unto.

Jonah upon Prayer was delivered out of the Belly of Hell, as he calls it; a dark Prison, or rather a Dungeon. When the Israelites should by their Sins have so far provoked God as to be made the Objects of his fiercest Indig-

Jonah 2.2.

Lev. 26.
40, 41, 42.

Deut. 30.
2, 3, 4.

Indignation, and to be punish'd eleven times, and seven times, and seven times more for their Iniquities; yet after all this, God promised them Mercy upon their sound Humiliation, and sincere Repentance. So again, when all the Curses of the Law should have overtaken and seized on that sinful People; and when for their monstrous Provocations God should have dispersed them, and scattered them amongst the Nations, and driven them even to the uttermost Parts of the Earth; yet if after all this they should return to the Lord, and obey his Voice, he promisseth to turn their Captivity, and to gather them out of all Places whither he had scattered them. He is graciously pleased to assure them, that if any of theirs should be driven out to the uttermost Parts of Heaven, from thence would the Lord their God gather them, and from thence would he fetch them.

There are two Branches of this Point.

1. He can afford Relief in the most deplorable and desperate Cases, for he is sufficient; He wants neither Wisdom nor Power to compass and work out the Deliverance of his People, how forlorn or deplorable soever their Condition may seem to be.

1st. As for Wisdom; He is the only wise God, Tim. 1. 17. His Understanding is infinite, Phil. 1. 7. 5. He knows how to deliver the Giddy, 2 Pet. 2. 9.

2^{dly}. His Power is equal to his Wisdom. Nothing is impossible with God, Luke 1. 37. No-
thing

thing is too hard for him, Gen. 18. 14. He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think, Eph. 3. 20. He is never at a Loss, though we be.

2. As he can, so he will afford Relief in all Cases, if he be duly sought unto, at least so far as shall be most for his own Glory, and our real Benefit and Advantage. For,

1st. The more sad any Man's Condition is, the more ready is he to relieve him, and the greater Compassion hath he for him: *Like as* Psal. 103.
a Father pitieth his Children, so the Lord pitieth 13.
them that fear him.

2^{dly}. The more sad any Man's Condition is, the more Glory will redound to God from relieving him.

Now to apply this in a Word. The proper Use of this Point is to encourage us to look up to God, and to be humble Petitioners to him for Relief in all our Distresses, never despairing of obtaining Succour as long as we have such an one to have recourse unto.

But to go on with the Text, which informs us, that God was entreated of him, and heard his Supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his Kingdom. He was entreated of him, not only so as to release him out of Prison, and to bring him back again into Jerusalem into his Kingdom, but so as to pardon his great and heinous Provocations, by which he had drawn that Misery upon himself: for that Manasseh was a true Penitent,

tent, we have all the reason to believe, not only in regard that it is said of him, that *he humbled himself greatly*, but also that upon his Return to *Jerusalem*, he took away the strange Gods, and the Idol out of the House of the Lord, and all the Altars that he had built, and cast them out of the City, and commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel. These were Fruits and Evidences of the Truth of his Repentance.

Now whereas such an one as *Manasseh* obtained the Pardon of his Sins; we may observe, *That the greatest Sinners may find Mercy with God if they duly seek it.*

This great Truth (for such it will be deemed by all that are truly sensible of their Sins) may be confirmed several ways.

1. From Instances of such notorious Sinners as have upon their Repentance obtained the pardon of their Sins. Instances whereof, are,

1. *Manasseh*, here in the Text, whose most heinous and abominable Provocations are at large described, *2 Kings 21. 2 Chron. 33.*

(2.) The Woman mentioned, *Luke 7. 37, 38.* and so on to the end of the Chapter. This Woman is there said to have been a Sinner, that is, a notorious and infamous Sinner; one that was known to be a lewd and vicious Woman all the Town over; in-
somuch that *Simon* the Pharisee, who had invited Christ to his House, took great offence at it, that he should suffer a Woman of such ill Report to come near him, as we may see, *ver. 39.* and yet this lewd and vicious Woman

man, upon her sincere Repentance, obtained the forgiveness of her Sins, whereof our Saviour assures her, *ver. 48.* saying unto her, *Thy Sins are forgiven thee.*

(3.) The Thief on the Cross, is another Instance of Mercy obtained at the Hands of God by a great Sinner, upon his sound Humiliation and unfeigned Repentance; *Luke 23. 40, 41, 42, 43.*

(4.) Another Instance hereof may be in those who are said to have used curious Arts, *Act. 19. 19.* that is, who addicted themselves unto Magick and Judicial Astrology. Many of these are said to have brought their Books together, (that is, their Books of Magick and Judicial Astrology) and to have burned them before all Men, thereby testifying the truth of their Repentance; upon which, without all question, they obtained the pardon of those their great and horrible Offences.

(5.) Another Instance may be in those notorious Sinners, a black Catalogue whereof we have, *1 Cor. 6. 9, 10.* namely, Fornicators, Idolaters, Adulterers, Effeminate, Abusers of themselves with Mankind, Thieves, Covetous, Drunkards, Revilers, Extortioners. Concerning which monstrous and prodigious Offenders the Apostle adds, *v. 11.* And such were some of you, but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the Name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. The Sum of all is, That as bad as they were, and as notoriously wicked as they had been, they obtained converting, pardoning and sanctifying Grace.

(6.) S. Paul

(6.) *S. Paul* may be another Instance here-
of, who though (according to his own ac-
knowledge^{ment}) he had been a *Blasphemer*,
1 Tim. 1. a *Persecutor*, an *injurious Person*, and the chief
13, 15. of *Sinners*; yet upon his *Repentance* he obtained
Mercy.

(7.) Another Instance may be in those
wicked Jews that crucified the Lord of Life;
three thousand whereof being converted by
A^{cts} 2, 36, *S. Peter's* Sermon, obtained the forgiveness of
—41. that horrid Sin.

2. That great Sinners may, upon sound and
sincere Repentance, obtain the pardon and
forgiveness of their Sins, may be confirmed
several other ways: As,

(1.) Because Mercy is promised to the
greatest Sinners, upon their Repentance, *Isa.*
1. 16, 17, 18. & 55. 7. *Ezek.* 18. 27, 28. &
30. 31, 32. *Mat.* 12. 31.

(2.) Promises of Pardon made unto peni-
tent and believing Sinners, run in general
Terms; *John* 3. 16. *Mark.* 16. 15, 16. *A^{cts}*
10. 43.

(3.) Christ invites all that feel the Burden
of their Sins, to come unto him, promising
them Ease and Refreshing if they come;
Mat. 11. 28. *John* 7. 37, 38. *Rev.* 22. 17.

(4.) Christ expostulates with Sinners, and
complains that they come not to him for
Mercy; *John* 5. 40. *Mat.* 23. 37.

(5.) He declareth and professeth that he
will reject and put off none that shall come
unto him; *John* 6. 37.

Use 1. This Truth is Matter of very great Encouragement to the chief of Sinners to come to Christ, and to be humble Suitors to him for the pardon of their Sins. They see that pardoning Mercy has been obtained by many of the greatest Sinners, that the Promises of finding Mercy with God upon condition of Faith and Repentance, run in general Terms, excluding none that are so qualified; they see that Christ most graciously invites all sorts of labouring and heavy-laden Sinners, without exception, to come unto him; that he expostulates with Sinners, and complains that they will not come unto him that they may have Life; and lastly, that he declareth and professeth that he will cast out none that come unto him, that come unto him in a due manner, and as they ought to come; that is to say, with unfeigned and sincere Repentance for their Sins past, and with firm Resolutions and sincere Endeavours to cast off and forsake their Sins for the time to come. Now what more can the greatest Sinners wish or desire, to encourage them to seek Mercy at the Hands of God, than that they may rest assured that they shall not lose their labour, that they shall not seek him in vain, but certainly obtain what they are Suitors to him for? But here however, they must be careful to seek him, (1.) Seasonably; *Isa. 55. 6. 2 Cor. 6. 2. Heb. 3. 15.* (2.) Earnestly and importunately, this manner of seeking God is that which prevails with him, especially when we

we seek unto him for so great a thing as is the forgiveness of our Sins; Jer. 29. 13.

(3.) Abandoning, forsaking and casting off
Ezek. 18. all their Transgressions; *that iniquity may not be*
30. *their Ruin.* If thus they come unto Christ

and seek Mercy at his Hands, (as hath been said before) Christ will in no wise turn them off with a Repulse, but assuredly and without fail entertain them graciously, and give them to find Mercy with him in the pardon and forgiveness of their Sins. 210111

But here desponding and discouraged Sinners be apt to object several things.

Object. 1. Saith the Sinner that is deeply affected and sadly cast down with the sense of his Sins, *None ever obtained Mercy, that sinned as I have done.*

Ans. (1.) That is a very rash and unadvised Speech, (as I have elsewhere shewed at large:) Do you know all the Sins which all the penitent Sinners that ever found Mercy with God, have been guilty of?

(2.) Consider and ponder a little better the Instances before-mentioned. Are your Sins greater than the Sins of *Manasseh*? Are your Sins greater than the Sins of that Woman, who was notorious for her Lewdness
Luk. 7. 37, all the City over? Are your Sins greater than
38. the Sins of all those foul and abominable Sinners, which the Apostle reckons up, 1 Cor. 6. 9, 10.

(3.) If your Sins have been really greater than the Sins of any of these, or all of them together; yet, Are they greater than the bound-

boundless Mercies of God, and the Merits of Christ? Take heed how you entertain such a Thought.

(4.) Are your Sins so great, as that they are without the compass of all the Promises made to believing and penitent Sinners? Far be it from you to harbour such black Thoughts concerning your Condition. If you had upon you the Guilt of all the Sins that ever have been committed since the Fall of Adam to this day, yet if you could sincerely repent of them all, cast them all off, and truly believe in Christ, you might be sure of the pardon of them: for so universal and unlimited, of so large a compass and extent are the Promises of Mercy which are made to all believing and penitent Sinners, that they would extend to them all, and take them in. This is so clear and evident, that no Exception can be made against it, unless by one that will be satisfied with nothing that can be laid before him, or offered him for his Satisfaction.

Object. 2. *But I have run on so long impatiently, and rejected so many Offers of Mercy; that I fear there is no Mercy, there can be none for me.*

Ans^w. (1.) Doth not God call and invite such as well as others? Are not his gracious Calls and Invitations to Repentance general? Are they any where restrained, or clogged with any Limitations? Are they any where narrowed and straitned with the exception of any sorts of Sinners whatsoever?

Y

(2.) How

(2.) How many of those in the Old Testament and in the New, that had long gone on in a sinful Course impenitently, obtained Mercy at length, notwithstanding the long-continued Perseverance in their evil Ways?

(3.) Do not the Promises of Mercy to be obtained by penitent and believing Sinners, extend to such as well as unto others? Where are they by any Scripture excluded from Mercy? And if the holy Scriptures exclude them not, why should they exclude themselves?

Matth. 12.
31. (4.) Doth not our Saviour assure us, that all manner of Sin and Blasphemy shall be forgiven unto Men upon their Repentance? (for that is ever in this matter supposed, though not expressed.) Now if all manner of Sin and Blasphemy shall upon Repentance be forgiven unto Men, then undoubtedly no truly humbled and sincerely penitent Sinners shall be denied the Forgiveness of their Sins, how long soever, and how obstinately soever they have gone on in their sinful Practices.

Object. 3. *But I fear I may not belong to the Election of Grace; and if so, then all my Endeavours to find Mercy with God would be fruitless.*

Ans. 1. You ought not to neglect your known Duty, because you cannot dive into God's secret Decrees: though you know not what God's secret Counsels and Purposes may be concerning you, yet he hath plainly

plainly and sufficiently revealed what your Duty is, and what he requires of you, in order, to your Salvation. It concerns you therefore not to trouble your Mind about God's secret Purposes concerning you, but to apply your self with all holy Diligence to the conscientious Performance of your Duty; and so doing, to cast your self upon the free Grace and Mercy of God in Christ: *Secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but things revealed belong to us, and to our Children, that we may do them.* Deut. 29.

2. If you perform your Duty as you ought, God will be sure to perform his Promises: you may depend and build upon it, that if you be not wanting to your Duty, he will never fail to deal with you according to his Word: *Heaven and Earth shall pass away, but his Word shall not pass away.* What God hath spoken, shall certainly take Effect. Mark 13.

3. This is the best Course, indeed the only Course which you can take to be satisfied concerning your Election. When you find in your self the Work of Grace, and the Fruits of true Faith and sincere Repentance, true Holiness and universal Obedience, a studious and holy Care and Endeavour to please God in all things, and to decline and avoid whatsoever is displeasing unto him; when you find these things in your self, you may thence certainly and infallibly conclude, that you are one of those who belong to the Election of Grace: for these

these things wrought in the Heart, are Fruits and Effects of God's electing Grace, and can be found in none but such as are his Children, his Elect, *ordained to eternal Life*; *Acts* 13. 48. *Eph.* 1. 4. *1 Thess.* 1. 4, 5. *2 Thess.* 2. 13. *Rom.* 8. 29, 30. *Col.* 3. 12. So then the Graces of the Spirit, and that holy Change which is wrought in the Hearts of all sound and sincere Converts, are Evidences of their eternal Election, as may be gathered from the Scriptures last mentioned; and therefore he that shall lay aside and neglect his known Duty, and resolve to do nothing towards his Salvation until he knows his own Election, must unavoidably perish, because his Election cannot be known, but by the Fruits and Effects thereof, appearing in the Holiness of Mens Lives and Conversations.

4. How many thousands, perhaps Millions, of glorified Saints may there be in Heaven, who never made this Scruple, or at least never suffered it so far to prevail with them, as to hinder and withhold them from giving all Diligence to make their Calling and Election sure, by an earnest Endeavour after Faith, Repentance, Holiness, and all other Graces accompanying Salvation?

And so I come to the 6th and last thing in the Words, namely, What *Manasseh* gained, or what he learned by all this: *Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God.*
We

We may not think that *Manasseh* was wholly ignorant of God before ; some kind of Knowledge of God he had, but he had no such experimental and effectual Knowledge of God, as by these God's Dealings with him he attained. That Knowledge of God which neither works upon the Heart, nor reforms the Life and Conversation, is little better than perfect Ignorance of God. It is said of the Sons of *Eli*, that they were Sons of Belial, and knew not the Lord: They knew not the Lord to any purpose; they knew him not in such a manner as they ought to have known him : and this was *Manasseh's* Case ; while he went on in his sinful Courses, and would not be reclaimed, he knew not the Lord. Whatever Knowledge of God he might have, it signified nothing in God's Account. But *Manasseh* by those sore Afflictions which God brought upon him, gained an experimental Knowledge of God's Power to subdue and humble the most stout and obstinate Sinners, of his Justice and Holiness in punishing Sin, of the Truth of his Threatnings and Denunciations of Judgments against Sinners ; of his gracious and merciful Disposition to pardon Sin, and to be reconciled to the greatest Sinners upon their sound Humiliation and sincere Repentance ; of God's absolute Dominion and uncontrollable Sovereignty over the highest among Men, pulling them down, laying them low, and raising them up again, as it seems good in his Eyes. The experimental Knowledge of

all these things in God, and relating to him, did *Manasseh* gain by that severe Course which God took with him, for bringing him home to himself, when gentler Means would not prevail. All this may be implied in those Words, *Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God.*

Now to apply this very briefly.

Use 1. This should reconcile us to Afflictions, and make us willing to come under that severe Course of Discipline which is so beneficial to us, and by which we gain so much.

Use 2. It should also teach us to improve our Afflictions, so as we may profit by them, and to observe what we gain by our Sufferings; for Gainers we shall be, if we be not wanting to our selves.

This is apparently God's End in bringing them upon us, who as a wise and careful Inspector, and a gracious Father, orders all things to our Advantage. And it becomes us accordingly to improve what he so graciously intends for our Good; to be humble and patient, to submit to his fatherly Chastisements, and to repent of those Sins he chastises us for.

The Thirteenth Sermon.

L A M. 3. 39, 40.

*Wherefore doth a living Man complain,
a Man for the Punishment of his
Sins ?*

*Let us search and try our ways, and
turn again to the Lord.*

THE main Scope of these Words is to direct us how we should carry our selves in time of Affliction. The Direction wick is here given us, consists of two Parts.

1. We are informed what we must not do; we must not complain: 'tis most unreasonable and unlawful to complain, whatever our Afflictions be. So much is at least implied in that interrogatory Form of Speech, *Wherefore doth a living Man complain, a Man for the Punishment of his Sins ?*

2. We are taught what is to be done, and what Course we ought to take when we are afflicted; We must *search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord.* So then the former

mer part of the Direction is negative, the latter affirmative.

As to the former of these, some apprehend there is a special Emphasis in those Words, *Wherefore doth a living Man complain?* But all do not understand and explain that Emphasis in the same manner. *Wherefore doth a living Man complain?* that is, as some conceive, Why doth any Man living complain of his Troubles and Afflictions, seeing 'tis the common Lot and Condition of all Men while they live here, to be subject to Afflictions, Man being *born unto Trouble, as the Sparks fly upward,* as *Eliphaz* sets forth the Calamitous Condition of Man in this World? Why should any Man living complain of that which befalls all others as well as himself, and which none may ever hope to be exempted from as long as they live upon this Earth? Others explain the Emphasis thus; *Why doth a living Man complain,* say they; forasmuch as while he is alive, whatever his sufferings be, he is mercifully and favourably dealt with? If he were treated according to the Desert of his Sins, he should no longer be a living Man; he should be cut off from the Land of the Living, and cast into Hell. Either of these Senses is agreeable enough to the Analogy of Faith; but of the two, the latter best suits with the principal Intendment of this Place, and with what follows in the latter Clause of the Verse; *Why doth a living Man complain, a Man for the Punishment of his Sins?* So long as there is no Evil that in this World ordinary befalls

fals a Man, but what hath relation to Sin, and must be looked upon as a just Punishment thereof; what reason hath any Man living to complain, as if he were hardly dealt with? But then to the end we may not mistake the meaning of the Words, we must consider what kind of Complaint is here condemned. In our Afflictions some sorts of complaining are allowed us; yea some Complaining is so far from being unlawful, that 'tis our Duty.

1st. It is lawful to express what we feel and suffer in those ways which Nature it self (I speak not now of sinful and depraved Nature) prompts unto us. So Groanings and Sighings, and louder Outcries sometimes in Extremity of tormenting Pain, are but as it were the Voice of Nature thus making Discovery of its Pressures, and as it were endeavouring to ease it self. And no doubt but there is some little Relief in that kind of Complaint: for Nature would be more oppress'd, if it always stifled and suppress'd its Inclinations to give Vent to its Anguish by complaining. And moreover, the Strength of Nature would be sooner wasted and spent, if so much of it must be always exerted and put forth to the utmost to keep in and imprison its Sorrows. We see God hath furnished unreasonable living Creatures, at least many of them, with some kind of natural Language whereby the Creature is able to complain when it suffers. And as for Man, what is purely natural to him, cannot be any part of his Sin: for the
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Creator never infused Sin or any Principle of sinful Depravation and Irregularity into any of his Creatures. What I have now said, may be of use to some who in Extremity of Anguish and bodily Pain are troubled at those Complaints which they cannot but give way to, and are apt to charge them on themselves as their Sin. There may be Complaints, and such as have a special Accent upon them; there may be loud Cries, and yet no Sin in all this. *David* speaks of his roaring, *Psal.* 22. 1. and so again, *Psal.* 32. 3. But though he roared all the day long, as in the Place last mentioned, yet we cannot thence necessarily infer that he was impatient. He was a holy and a patient Man, who being often enforced to cry out through the Sharpness of his exquisite Pain, said, *Though I roar, yet I do not murmur.* You may cry out, and it may be, roar also, from the Anguish of your Pain, and yet it's possible there may not be the least sinful Discomposure of your Spirit, or rising of your Heart against God so laying his Hand upon you.

2dly. We may lawfully and freely complain to those that are about us, to our Friends, Relations and Acquaintance; we may lay open our Griefs, and represent our Sufferings to the full, with all the Circumstances of them, when and where there is just Oecasion. And this may be very necessary and beneficial, both in reference to them and ourselves: For besides the present easing of our Hearts by this Discovery of our Troubles,

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we hereby make them sensible of our Condition, and kindle in them those Compassions towards us, which our present Condition calls for: we stir them up to Prayer for us, and give them occasion of exercising all those Graces which the Afflictions of others call forth and imploy. But here we must take heed that in our Complaints we make not our Afflictions greater than they are; that we aggravate them not beyond the just Measures and true Weight of them; a thing too ordinary with the Afflicted, especially in some Cases.

3dly. We may in our Afflictions complain to God also as well as to Men. 'Tis our Duty to spread our Condition before him, imploring that Relief from him, which his Hand alone is able to reach forth unto us. Not as if he were ignorant of our Estate or Concernments, but he would have us so to manifest that we are sensible of his Hand upon us, and that we have no Expectation of Relief from any else but him.

4thly. The Servants of God have not only a Liberty of making their Complaints to God in their Afflictions, but also of humbly expostulating with him about them, provided that it be done in a due manner, and so as the Distance between God and his Creature be observed. We have frequent Examples hereof in Scripture. Sometimes holy Men expostulate with God concerning the Grievousness and Severity of their Afflictions: Sometimes concerning the Length and Duration

ration of them; sometimes concerning the Instruments which God makes use of to correct them; sometimes concerning his seeming to cast off all Care of them in their Afflictions, neither minding their Sufferings, nor regarding their Prayers: *Is my Strength the Strength of Stones, and is my Flesh of Brass?* saith Job, chap. 6. 12. *Why hast thou set me as a Mark against thee, so that I am a Burden to my self?* Job 7. 20. *How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord, for ever? How long wilt thou hide thy Face from me?* saith David, Psal. 13. 1. *O Lord God of Hosts, how long wilt thou be angry against the Prayer of thy People?* Psal. 80. 4. *Where is thy Zeal and thy Strength, the Sounding of thy Bowels, and of thy Mercies towards me? Are they restrained?* So expostulated the Church with God, *Isa. 63. 15. Wherefore doth the way of the Wicked prosper? and wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?* said the Prophet Jeremiah, chap. 12. 1. But though the Servants of God take the Boldness thus to expostulate with God, yet they do not charge him foolishly, or lay any Imputation of Unjustice or inequitable Rigour on his Providences, unless when they are under some present Distemper, as sometimes it may seem to have been with Job and the Prophet Jeremiah. They evermore, when in their proper and right Frame, ascribe Righteousness to their Maker, and the meritorious Cause of all their Sufferings to themselves. And so in those darker Providences in which they could not discern the Reasons of God's Dispensations, or the Equity

Equity of his Proceedings, yet they still adhered to this as a Principle not to be questioned, That God was Righteous. This the Prophet *Jeremiah*, when about to expostulate with God, addresseth himself thereunto with this Preface, *Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee; yet let me talk with thee of thy Judgments*: And then he goes on with the Expostulation before-mentioned; *Wherefore doth the way of the Wicked prosper? and wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?* So the Prophet *Habakkuk* also makes the like Preface to his Expostulation; *Thou art of purer Eyes; (saith he) than to behold Evil, and canst not look upon Iniquity: Wherefore lookest thou on them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy Tongue when the Wicked devoureth the Man that is more righteous than he?* And the same holy Frame of Spirit should there be in us: Though we may in some Cases take the Liberty of humble and reverend Expostulation with God, yet we must take heed of any unmeet Reflections upon his Justice or Goodness, and still remember our Distance from him, that *God is in Heaven, and we are upon Earth*, as *Solomon* speaks, *Eccles. 5. 2*. And that he giveth not account of any of his Matters, as *Elihu* excellently represents him to *Job*, chap. 33. 13.

Hab. 1. 13.

So then all these sorts of Complaints being allowed us, the Complaint condemned in the Text, is that which either proceeds from, or is joined with Impatience under God's Hand, and Discontent with his Providence;

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'tis the Complaint of an unquiet and sinfully disturbed Spirit, which the Scripture sometimes expresseth by murmuring: so here the Word in the Original may properly enough be translated; and so the same Word is rendered, *Numb. 11. 1.* Now the Evil and Unreasonableness of this kind of Complaint under the Hand of God, may appear several ways.

1. 'Tis long before God takes the Rod in Hand to correct: he bears long even with the vilest of Sinners, and exerciseth much Patience towards them; *He is slow to Anger, and of great Mercy, Psal. 145. 8. He is merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in Goodness, Exod. 34. 6.* He takes no Delight in Severity, further than we provoke him thereunto: *He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the Children of Men, Lam. 3. 33.* And should not this Consideration be of Force to suppress all our discontented Complains and Murmurings, That God is so unwilling to use Severity against us; that he is so hardly drawn on to chasten us, and that he never doth it till we have given him much Cause so to handle us?

2. When we by our many Provocations have put the Rod into his Hand, he is soon prevailed with to lay it aside again: He is not of that implacable Temper, that he can never be reconciled to those against whom he hath once taken up any Displeasure. Upon our humble Submission to his Corrections, and sincere Resolutions and Endeavours to reform what hath been amiss, he is graciously

ciously inclined to lay aside his Displeasure: *He is ready to forgive*: most ready to shew *Psal. 86. 5.* Mercy as soon as we are in any measure fit for Mercy. He doth not always chide, nor *keep his Anger for ever.* Was this only *David's* *Pf. 103. 9.* particular Experience? and is it not ours also? Do not we find how easy he is to be entreated, and how ready to pardon? Have we not had manifold Experiments thereof in the Course of our Lives? And should not this perswade us quietly and patiently to submit to his Corrections, while he is pleased to keep us under his chastning Hand?

3. While he judgeth it fit to correct us, he lays no more upon us than our Sins deserve. When we are most severely handled, and are apt to complain we have hard measure, yet even then do not his Severities in the least exceed the Demerits of our Sins: God doth us no wrong; nor is it possible that he should, for his Will is the Rule and Measure of Righteousness: *The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his Works, Psal. 145. 17. The just Lord will not do iniquity, Zeph. 3. 5.* What Cause then is there, or can there be of complaining where no Wrong is done? With this the Church of God silenceth her self, and stops her own Mouth when under the most dreadful Effects of God's Displeasure: *The Lord is righteous, saith she, for I have rebelled against his Commandments.* *Lam. 1. 18.* And with this God stoppeth the Mouth of his People; *Why criest thou for thine Afflictions? Because thy Sins were* *Jer. 30. 15.*

were increased, have I done these things unto thee.

4. When God afflicts most grievously, his Severities are far short of what our Sins deserve. Under the heaviest Weight of Punishment *Ezra's Acknowledgment in the Name* *Ezra 9.13.* of the Church must be ours; *We are punished less than our Iniquities deserve.* Our Sins deserve not only all the temporal Plagues and Judgments which we are capable of undergoing, but Hell, the unutterable and endless Torments of the Lake that burns with Fire and Brimstone. Wherefore whatever our Sufferings be in this World, so long as we are on this side Hell, so little Cause have we to complain, that we have great Cause to be thankful that it is not far worse with us than it is.

5. How much soever God is pleased to afflict us, yet still we enjoy many Mercies in the mean time, by which the Bitterness of our Afflictions is much allayed, and the Smart of them much abated. For one or two Crosses we are compassed about with Variety of Blessings: In Sicknes we have the Pity and Compassion of Friends and Acquaintance; we have all that Service and Assistance that many Hands about us can afford us; we have all those Means of Relief that either Love or Art can supply us with: And all this, besides those inward and powerful Supports which we have more immediately from God. Again, if it so be that God afflicts us in one of our Relations, we have Matter
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of Comfort in divers others of them. If we have Losses in our temporal Estate, yet our spiritual and better Concernments are safe and untouched. If Man be at Variance with us, yet we have Peace with God. How sadly soever we may in our Afflictions represent things to our selves, God never stirs up all his Wrath against us at once, nor suffers his whole Displeasure to arise. God never so mingles the Cup which he puts into our Hands, but that there are some Ingredients of a benign and friendly Nature to qualify the Malignity of the rest. The Malignity did I say? There is indeed no real Malignity in any of the Ingredients of that spiritual Physick which God administers to his. All things have a kind and beneficial Influence for promoting our Good, and furthering our highest Interest. And where now is there any Place left for complaining? Amidst so many Mercies, can we yet find in our Hearts to complain? Be it so, that some things are not only unacceptable, but very grievous to us; *Shall we receive Good at the Hands of God, and shall we not receive Evil?* Shall we bear nothing at the Hands of him who is so good and gracious, so kind and bountiful to us many other ways? Let us not suffer two or three Afflictions so to imbitter our Spirits, and vitiate our Palats, as that we should not relish the Sweetness of any of those Mercies, which in our most afflicted Condition we still enjoy.

6. Add to all this, that God hath a Sovereignty of Power and Dominion over his Creatures, by virtue whereof he may deal with them as he pleaseth. According to this his absolute Power, though the Creature had never sinned, yet God might expose it to whatever sort or degree of misery he should think fit to subject it to. He that made the Creature out of nothing, as he might turn it into nothing again if he pleased; so continuing it in being, he might lay any kind of Pain or Anguish upon it without relation to Sin. We see what Anguish the unreasonable Creatures endure, which yet are not capable of Sin: And why might not God inflict the like on any rational Creature, though no Sin had occasioned it, or made way for it? It is not easy to give a Reason why he might not: for even an innocent Creature, being a Creature, however, must of necessity be in Subjection to the Power and Dominion of the Creator, from whom it received its Being. 'Tis true, such Evils could not then have the Nature of Punishment, because Punishment, properly so called, hath relation to Sin; but yet there could be no Injustice in such a Dispensation, no more than when by many tormenting and lingering Pains God takes away the Lives of brute Beasts, whose Nature is not a Subject capable of Sin or moral Evil.

Now in such a Case the Creature would have no just Cause to complain or murmur, because no Injury could possibly be done it
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by God's using that just and rightful Power and Dominion which he hath over the Work of his Hands. Whence we may thus argue to our present Purpose: If God's absolute Power over the Work of his Hands be such as calls for humble Submission to his Providence, and silent bearing of whatever he inflicts; how much more should his Justice strike us dumb, and effectually restrain us from all murmuring or muttering against him? If we ought not to complain or murmur though we had no Sin, how much less reason have we to do it when we have so much? Upon this Consideration it was that the Church took up her Resolutions of patient Submission to the Hand of God; *I will bear the Indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him.*

Mich. 7. 9

Now I come to apply what hath been spoken.

Use 1. Let us in all our Afflictions observe the Frame of our Hearts, and be humbled for all the secret Grudgings and Risings of our Spirits against the Providence of God: And especially if the inward Distempers of our Souls should be at any time so great as to break forth and vent themselves in any unmeet Language; if our inward Discontents and Heart-burnings should discover themselves by complaining and murmuring against God, and by making such Representations of him to others, as if he had dealt hardly with us, and as if we

might have expected other measure at his Hands,

This is a Miscarriage which we are very apt to run into when our Afflictions are severe and lasting, when they smart much and continue long. But however it fare with us, the Sinsfulness of our murmuring against God is so great, that no Circumstance of our Sufferings can render it excusable; and therefore we cannot be sufficiently humbled for it.

To the end we may the better discover the Evil of it, and see what reason there is why we should be humbled for it, let us first look upon it in its Cause, and the Root whence it springs; then let us behold it as it is in itself, and consider it in its formal Nature: And lastly let us view it in its Effects and Consequents.

1. Let us look upon it in its Root. We loath and abhor some things the more when we know whence they are, and what gave Birth to them, the wicked Off-spring for the cursed Mother that bare it and brought it forth.

Now the Root of our Murmuring is our Pride; we have entertained too good an Opinion of our selves; we think we have deserved better things at the Hands of God, and therefore we murmur and complain as if we were injured. Were we thoroughly sensible of our Sinsfulness; were we convinced that we are worthy of far sorer Evils than those which we groan under, instead of murmuring,

muring, we would not only accept of the Punishment of our Sins, as the Phrase is, *Levit. 26. 41.* take in good part, meekly and patiently bear whatsoever God lays on us, but from our Hearts acknowledge that we are mercifully and kindly dealt with in that no more is inflicted on us.

2. If we behold it as it is in it self, and consider the formal Nature of it, our murmuring is in effect nothing else but a Degree of Insurrection and Rebellion against God. As discontented Subjects, or mutinous Soldiers sharpen their Tongues against their Prince or General, and thereby heighten their own and other Mens Discontents, to dispose them to make a Resistance : So when we murmur against God, we set our Mouths against Heaven, doing what in us lies to strengthen in our selves, and instill into others Principles of Disaffection against the highest Majesty, and to withdraw them with whom we converse from their Obedience and Loyalty.

3. Let us view it in the Effects and Consequents of it. We are so far from easing our selves by murmuring, that it both increaseth and prolongeth our Afflictions.

1st. It increaseth them ; for our Unquietness and Stubbornness under God's Hand provokes him to lay more Load upon us ; that is all we gain by our Untowardness ; as the Child that struggles, swells and murmurs when he is corrected, doth but thereby procure to himself the more Stripes.

Besides, our fretting and murmuring doth of it self make those our Afflictions much more grievous, which might be undergone with Ease, if with humble Silence and Patience we submitted our selves to the Chastisement of our heavenly Father.

2dly. It also prolongs our Afflictions; for our murmuring diverts us, and takes us off from applying our selves to that Course, which, if any thing, would put a speedy End to our Troubles. And that is the Course which we are put upon in the Text, namely, a serious Reflection upon our selves, and a diligent Search and Enquiry after the Sins which have procured our Afflictions, and a turning from them unto God whom we have forsaken.

As long as we are taken up in murmuring, this Work is not minded, and so our Afflictions are protracted and drawn out to a greater length than they should have been, if instead of murmuring against God we had seasonably and narrowly searched into our Hearts and Ways, found out our Sins, judged our selves for them, and forsaken them.

Thus we see what Reason we have to be humbled for this Sin.

But though in these Respects all that are guilty of it have Cause to be humbled; yet have they most reason to be humbled for murmuring, who have least reason to murmur: such as are,

1. Great and notorious Sinners, whose Offences and Enormities have been such, that whatsoever they suffer, unless they be wilfully blind, or strangely partial to themselves, they must be enforced to confess that they suffer justly. Should they complain of hard measure, who are so bad that no Punishment is severe enough for them? And yet these are oft-times as ready to complain as any else.

2. Those who have drawn such Afflictions upon themselves, as in which they may plainly read their Sin written in legible Characters. The unclean Person who hath by his lewd Courses brought those Evils upon himself, which are the proper Effects and Punishments of that Sin: The great Oppressor of others, that is through God's righteous Judgment fallen into the merciless Hands of Oppressors himself: The Extortioner, that having raised an Estate by Rapine and Violence, hath lived to see the Extortioner catch all that he hath: The false Accuser, who having by Lies and Slanders robbed others of their good Name and Estates, is now fallen under the Lash of those false Tongues that spare him no more than he hath spared others. Have any of these reason to murmur against God's Providence? Should not their own Guilt stifle their Complaints, and stop their Mouths? Or, if they will open them, should it not be to give Glory to God's Justice, by whose over-ruling and most righteous Providence it hath come to pass, that

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they

they suffer either in the same kind in which they have offended, or in that which corresponds, and bears a visible Proportion with it?

3. When Men suffer that which they have often been forewarned of; when they have met with many Caveats and Cautions; when it hath been often foretold them what the certain Consequents and unavoidable Issues of such Courses would be, and yet they would presumptuously go on, and rush into Danger, as the Horse rusheth into the Battel. Have these Men reason to complain of any but themselves? If Men will run into the Briars, and none can withhold them, have they any cause to complain that they are scratch'd and torn? And yet even in such Cases as this, the Circumstances whereof a Man would think are such as leave a Man no colour of complaining; yet will Men find out Matter of Complaint even against God himself, their Hearts rising against his Providence, that he should thus leave them to themselves, and suffer them to go on so wilfully and fool-hardily upon Danger. As if God were bound to cure all Man's Perverseness, and to subdue his Obstinacy; and as if it were God's Fault that Man will not hearken to good Counsel.

If obstinate and refractory Sinners will run upon their own Ruine notwithstanding all Warnings, they must know their Destruction is of themselves, and they have none to thank for it but themselves.

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4. When the Evils under which Men lie, are the direct and proper Issues and Products of their own impatient Desires and most importunate Prayers: when Men beg things of God, and pursue them with restless Importunities, and will take no Denial whether the things be good for them or no; if having obtained them, they relish nothing but Gall and Wormwood in them, instead of the Content and Satisfaction they promised themselves, where can they justly lay the Blame but on themselves? Have they any Plea to justify their murmuring against God, who indeed gave them their Desires in Anger, and gratified them to their Smart, because nothing else would satisfy them? They would be their own Carvers, and take upon themselves to understand what was good for them better than God. If *Rachel's* longing for Children be so impatient that she must have them, or she will die, if God give her a Child that shall cost her her Life, what reason hath she to complain of any but her self, and the impetuous Irregularity of her own Desires, that she purchased it at so dear a rate? If the *Israelites* must have Quails, and no other Food will please their inordinate Palat; if they eat till they surfeit of them, till they come out of their Nostrils, and the next News be that the Plague is among them, shall they yet charge God foolishly, and lay the Blame upon him? If the boundless Desires of the ambitious Man aspire to a Crown, and nothing else will satisfy him: when he hath gotten it,
if

if he find it lined with Thorns, can he murmur at Providence that hath set it on his Head?

If murmuring be any where unreasonable and unjust, then certainly 'tis when Men suffer in those very things which were the Objects of their most passionate Desires and unwearied Importunities. But yet,

5. After all that hath been said, they have least Reason to complain, and of all others have least to justify their Murmurings, who have the best and most effectual Arguments to quiet their Spirits under every Providence, and to keep down all the inordinate Workings of their Hearts. And such are all they who having obtained the Pardon of their Sins, have an Interest in God's special Love and Favour through Christ. For,

1st. They may know that whatever befalls them, Sin being pardoned, the Curse and Sting of every Affliction is taken out: Though their Afflictions may be bitter and grievous to Nature, yet there is no Poison in them, nothing of a hurtful or destructive Nature: Gal. 3. 13. Christ hath removed the Curse, being made a Curse for us.

2^{dly}. They may know that all their Sufferings are intended for their Advantage, not for their Prejudice, and shall undoubtedly be advantagious to them in the End, however for the present they may not so clearly discern God's particular Design and Intendment in them. God hath assured them, that Rom. 8. 28. *all things work together for Good to them that love*

love God, to those that are called according to his Purpose.

3dly. They are sure to be supported under all their Pressures. They may sometimes be hardly put to it, but yet they shall never want Supplies of Strength proportionable to their Burdens. God will mercifully consider their Weakness, and lay no more upon them than he will enable them to bear. He is faithful, and will not suffer them to be tempted above what they are able.

1 Cor. 10.
13.

4thly. They are sure to be eased of their Afflictions in God's due time: *The Rod of the Wicked shall not rest upon the Lot of the Righteous; it shall not always rest there, Psal. 125. 3. Many are the Afflictions of the Righteous, but the Lord delivereth them out of them all, Psal. 34. 19.*

5thly. Tho their Afflictions should run parallel with their Lives, and have no other End than by Death, yet the endless and unspeakable Happiness of the World to come will be an abundant Compensation for all their Afflictions here, *The Sufferings of this present time being not worthy to be compared with the Glory that shall be revealed in us.*

Rom. 8. 18.

Now, I say, if such as have these excellent and sovereign Cordials, these solid Grounds of Consolation, these efficacious Means of quieting their Hearts, and suppressing all their sinful Distempers, should yet murmur under the Hand of God, their Murmuring of all others would be most inexcusable. If such should murmur, what might be expected from them who have none of these

these things to charm and compose their Spirits? Well might they *gnaw their Tongues, and blaspheme the God of Heaven for Anguish, because of their Pains*; as the Carriage of some of the Wicked in their Afflictions is described, *Rev. 16. 10, 11.*

But let not us by our unquiet and impatient Demeanor under the Hand of God, dishonour our Profession, and disparage those excellent Grounds of Tranquillity and Calmness of Spirit under every Dispensation of Divine Providence, which our Religion supplies and furnisheth us with: Let it appear that we are above all those things which are wont to disturb the Minds, and discompose the Spirits of them that know not God, and are Strangers to the Covenant of Grace, and have no Acquaintance with the Privileges thereof.

The

The Fourteenth Sermon.

L A M. 3. 39, 40.

*Wherefore doth a living Man complain,
a Man for the Punishment of his
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*Let us search and try our ways , and
turn again to the Lord.*

Use 2. **I**N the second Place, let us all, especially such of us as have these Grounds of inward Peace, Quiet, silent Contentment; and humble Submission to the good Pleasure of God in all our Troubles; I say, let us be exhorted to keep our Hearts in an even, quiet and undisturbed Temper under all Providences. Such a Frame, how comfortable would it render every Condition to us! How light and easy would it make every Burden and Pressure to us! And how much Sin would it prevent, which *the fretting of our Hearts against the Lord*, as *Solomon* expresseth it, *Prov. 19. 3.* and the tumultuous Fermentings of our Spirits against his Providence, would hurry us into.

In

In the further Prosecution of this Use, I shall first propound a few things for the quieting of our Hearts in Afflictions, and then I shall answer some of those Pleas or Objections which unbroken and unruly Spirits, not sufficiently subdued to God, make use of to justify their Excesses.

In order to the quieting of our Hearts amidst all our Trials, and to the taming of our rebellious Spirits.

1. Let us get our Hearts fully possessed of the absolute Sovereignty and Dominion which God hath over us. Such is his Power over us, that we and all the Nations of the World are in his Hands but as the Clay in the Hand of the Potter, as God makes the Comparison, *Jer. 18. 6.* He may form us and fashion us, do with us and dispose of us as he sees good: Neither need he render any other Reason or Account of what he doth, than that of his own good Pleasure. Now as the Apostle argues, *Rom. 9. 20, 21.* *Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the Potter power over the Clay, to make one Vessel unto Honour, and another unto Dishonour; one for a baser Use, another for a more honourable Service?* Let this rest and abide upon your Heart, that God hath this Power over you; and you will judge it no less unreasonable and intolerably saucy, that you should murmur or contest with God about his Dealings with you, than that the Clay should rise up and contest with the Potter.

2. Keep

2. Keep alive in your Heart a Sense of God's Love in every Dispensation. Black Thoughts of God, and our representing him to our selves as our Enemy, and every of his Chastisements as Fruits of his Hatred, cannot but leaven our Hearts with such a sullen Morosity and Sowness, as will make us seek all Opportunities of quarrelling with him. We take nothing well at the Hands of him whom we take to be our Enemy, because we look upon all his Actions through the Glass of that Image which we have framed of him in our Minds. So while we look upon God as our Enemy, 'tis not to be wondred at that we should be ready to pick matter of complaining against him, and contesting with him, out of all the Passages of his Providence.

But on the other hand, good Thoughts of God, and a lively Sense of his Love upon our Hearts, would make whatsoever he doth to look of another Colour. Viewing his Providences through these Spectacles, we should read his Kindness in whatsoever he doth to us or about us; and we should be inclined to make the best Construction of every thing that seems to be of a doubtful Aspect. And how powerfully would this subdue our Spirits, sweeten our Affections, and make us willing to bear with Silence and Quietness those things which to another would be intolerable?

3. Labour to have always a fresh Remembrance of your Sins. To this purpose it might
be

be of good Use to us, to single out some of our chief Sins, by which we have most dishonoured God, and wounded our Consciences, and to have them always in a Readiness by us, that they may presently occur to our Thoughts, when at any time our Hearts begin to rise against God in respect of any of his Dealings.

This would furnish us with matter of Argument to reason down the rebellious Insurrections of our Spirits, as soon as ever they begin to take Distaste at any thing that God hath done. Should such as we, so vile, so sinful, so unworthy, as in such and such Instances of our Provocations we have appeared to be, take pet at any thing that God doth? Have we done as bad things as we could against him, and is it for us to be complaining of any thing that he doth?

4. Add to all this the Consideration of the extream Danger of quarrelling with God, and opposing our selves against him. Dare
 1 Cor. 10. we provoke the Lord? *Are we stronger than he?*
 22. saith the Apostle. Dare we challenge him into the Feild, and run upon the thick Bosses of his Buckler? Let us remember the Battel, and
 Job 41. 8. do no more, as God cautioned Job in the like
 Isa. 45. 9. Case. *Wo unto him that striveth with his Maker: let the Potterd strive with the Potterds of the Earth.* Let not us frail Creatures contend with God who can dash us in pieces; yea, turn us into nothing in a Moment.

And

And so I come to speak to those Pleas whereby some endeavour to justify their complaining.

Object. 1. *My Afflictions*, saith one, *are such as never any Man was exercised with the like, all thing considered: I could, I hope, with some Degree of Quietness and Silence bear any other Crosses; but here I must be allowed to give way to some Distemper, when my Cross is singular.*

Ans. 1. Whereas you say, never any Man was afflicted as you are, you speak rashly and unadvisedly. Are you so well acquainted with the several Afflictions of all the Afflicted that at present are, or ever were in the World, that you should pronounce so peremptorily, that never any was afflicted as you are? Alas, your Knowledge reacheth but a little way. How many are there within the Compass of a few Miles, it may be within the Limits of the same Town or Parish where you live, whose particular Cases, and the various Circumstances of whose Afflictions you are perfectly ignorant of?

2. How many have had the very same Thoughts of their Afflictions besides your self? 'Tis indeed every Man's Temper in great Afflictions, and under dark Providences, to say with the Church, *Lam. 1. 12. Behold and see if there be any Sorrow like unto my Sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the Day of his fierce Anger.*

In sore Afflictions we are not competent Judges of the Matters that concern our Sufferings; no more than a sick Man is a competent Judge of the Estate of his Body, when his Disease hath gotten Possession of his Head, and disturbed his Fancy.

Again, whereas you say you should bear any other Cross with more Calmness and Silence; you speak as one neither acquainted with your own Weakness, nor with the Deceitfulness of your Heart.

1st. Your Language bewrays your small Acquaintance with your Weakness: You know not what Frailty you might discover if God should try you some other way, though it should be with a far lighter and more favourable Affliction. We are never thoroughly acquainted with our Weakness till we be tried. All our Strength lies in God; if he be pleased to stand by us, to support and strengthen us, we may bear, we may easily and comfortably bear the greatest Affliction; if he withdraw the Influences of his Supports, and the Supplies of his Grace, the smallest Affliction will worst us.

Do we not observe how strong we are sometimes to conflict with great Trials, and how weak other-while, when far smaller and less considerable Afflictions encounter us? Who maketh us thus to differ from our selves, but God, as he either vouchsafeth us his Presence and powerful Assistances, or withholdeth them?

2^{dly}. You

2dly. You speak as one too much a Stranger to the Deceitfulness of your Heart: You think you could bear any other Affliction better, and that no other thing could have so discomposed you, and put you out of order; but herein your false and guileful Heart deludes you. If you were afflicted in some other kind, your Heart would then be as likely to tell you that you could bear any other Affliction better than that: Your present Affliction would still be judged the most difficult to be born.

You are like a sick Man, who complains of the Bed on which he lies, and thinks he should be better at ease if he lay any where else: but when he makes trial of another Bed, he still finds himself as restless and uneasy as he was before: He now finds 'tis the Distemper of his Body, not the Uneasiness of his Bed, that makes him restless.

You think you should bear another Affliction better, and more like a Christian; but as long as your Heart is unsubdued to God, and the unquiet and rebellious Distempers of your Spirit remain and stick close to you, it is not to be questioned but that you would be as unquiet, and as apt to complain and murmur under any other sharp Affliction as under this. 'Tis the Change of your Heart, and not the Change of your Affliction, that must dispose you to a patient Undergoing of your Burden.

Object. 2. *But, saith another, I see others as bad as my self, not so severely chastened: God*
A 2 2
seems

seems to single me out, and to set me up as a Mark to shoot at, and to direct all his Arrows against me: He makes me a Spectacle of his severe Wrath, and the only Instance of his fierce Indignation. Why should I be so grievously punished while others escape?

Ans. 1. You do not well understand your self, nor remember the Distance between God and you. While you thus complain, what is this but to contend with the Almighty, and to quarrel with him as if he were your Equal or Inferior? Is he to be accountable to you for his Actions? Must he treat you and other Men as you shall judge fitting? Must he manage the Government of the World as you would have him? And will you be angry and fall out with him if he doth not?

This is not a Deportment becoming the Creature towards its Creator. An humble Acknowledgment of your Sin, and a Profession of your Resolution to reform, were more agreeable to your Condition, and the Circumstances under which you stand towards God. Surely it is meet to be said unto God, *I have born Chastisement, I will not offend any more. That which I see not, teach thou me; if I have done Iniquity, I will do no more.* So *Elihu* judged, *Job* 34. 31, 32.

2. Are you the only Instance of God's Severity? Are there not many more to be seen, if you look abroad and cast your Eyes up and down the World? Though God's Patience and Long-sufferance be admirable for

for the present, and though he hath thought fit to put over the Punishment of the greater part of Offences to the Judgment of the great Day; yet in the mean time he so consults the Honour of his Justice here, as not to leave the World without many signal Instances of his Severity against Sin. And if it seem good to him to make you one of those Instances, what have you to object against it? Is he not at liberty to make use of what Instances he pleaseth? If he had thought fit to let you pass unpunished, and instead of you had pitched on any other, might not that other Person have had as good a Plea for complaining as you now think you have?

It seems by your Exceptions against God's Providence, that he must either punish all Offenders here, or none. This is the Rule which you would set him for the Exercise of this Part of his Government of the World: and if he do not observe it, you will contest with him about it, and have from him an Account thereof.

If God make choice of you to vindicate the Honour of his Justice and Holiness before the World, and to take off some part of that Imputation, which in the Judgment of carnal Wisdom, from his Patience, seems to lie upon his Justice: if in you, as in one remarkable Instance, he will let the World see how much he hates Sin, and with what exact and severe Righteousness he intends to judge the World hereafter, should you mur-

mur at it? Should you not rather be well contented that God might have any Honour by your Sufferings? that you who have by your Sins so much dishonoured him, should be capable of suffering any thing whereby any slender Reparations might be made to his Honour? Were you not made for his Glory? and if you would not be persuaded to promote it by doing, were it not better you should contribute to it by suffering, than that you should wholly lose the End of your Creation?

2 Cor. 7:
11.1

4. Consider whether your complaining of God's Severity against you, while he deals more favourably with many others, be not a clear Evidence that your Heart is not thoroughly humbled for Sin. The Apostle, among other Fruits and Evidences of true Repentance and godly Sorrow for Sin, makes mention of *Indignation and Revenge*. An holy Indignation which the truly humbled Sinner, the true Penitent, hath against himself, for having so grievously offended God, and an holy Revenge which he takes upon himself on that Account. How widely different are complaining and murmuring from that holy Frame of the penitent Sinner which the Apostle describes? When you suffer your Heart to rise, and give your Tongue liberty to murmur against God, you seem to direct the Edge of your Indignation and Revenge against him, rather than against your self.

A due Sense of your Sin, and of the Dishonour you have done to God thereby, would make you even out of an holy Indignation and Revenge against your self, humbly and patiently to submit to the utmost of that Severity which God is pleased to exercise towards you.

107. Remember how ill God took it from his People the *Jews*, that they complained the Way of the Lord was not equal; which is in effect your Complaint: Concerning this he complains and exhortates with them; *Ye say, The Way of the Lord is not equal. Hear now, O House of Israel, Is not my Way equal? Are not your Ways unequal? And so again, ver. 19. And then he adds, ver. 30. Therefore will I judge you, O House of Israel, every one according to his Ways, saith the Lord God: repent and turn your selves from all your Transgressions, so Iniquity shall not be your Ruine. As if he had said, Whereas ye complain of the Inequality of my Dealings with you, unless you repent I will destroy you all; and then you will have little Cause to complain of my unequal Dealings. They who complain of the Inequality of God's dealing with them, had need take heed lest God lay Judgment to the Line, and Righteousness to the Plummets, as he threatens, *Isa. 28. 17.* Lest he lay heavier things upon them; lest he bring such Judgments on them as shall come up more nearly to the Measures, the Proportion and Demerits of their Sins. How much sorer they have suffered, God may yet lay*

Ezek. 18.
25.

much more upon them, and yet still punish them much less than their iniquities deserve.

6. Whereas you complain that God deals more severely with you than with many others, think with your self, how which way

1st. That 'tis possible your Sins may have been greater than the Sins of such as you have in your Eye; greater in respect of the Circumstances and Aggravations of them. It may be they never sinned against so much Light, and so many clear Convictions; against such Mercies, and so many Discoveries of God's Love; against so many Warnings and gentler Chastisements; against so many severer Strokes, when milder Courses would not prevail. Can you wonder at it that God deals more severely with you than with others, if upon Examination it should be found that your Sins have been greater than theirs?

2^{dly}. It may be God intends you more Good than many others. By sorer Afflictions he means to make you better, and so much the better as your Afflictions have been, and are greater. His Chastisings, though severe, are no Evidences of his Hatred, but Fruits of his Love, and of his Purpose to do your Soul much Good by them; for

Prov. 3. 12. *whom the Lord loveth he correcteth, even as a Father doth the Son in whom he delighteth.*

3^{dly}. What if the time for correcting some others be not yet come? even they who have

have been hitherto spared, or been dealt very gently with, may hereafter, if milder Remedies do no good, be as severely dealt with as you have been. God takes his own Time, and make use of his own Methods for disciplining all his; and some he sees good to handle after one manner, some after another, as to his Wisdom seems best.

Obj. What if some of those, who are for the present spared, should be reserved to the Judgment of the last Day, while you are chastised here, that you may not be condemned with the World hereafter. God may spare some others in Anger, and correct you in Mercy; for his forbearing to punish is sometimes no Fruit of his Favour, but an Effect of his highest Displeasure, according to that, *Psal. 81. 11, 12.* *My People would not hearken to my Voice, and Israel would none of me: So I gave them up to their own Hearts Lust.*

Object. 3. But my Troubles are long and tedious, saith another; there is no End of them. I have been waiting and waiting for Deliverance, but it comes not. I see others in Trouble, and I see them come well out of it; but my Feet stick fast in the Mire.

Ans. To this I answer, 1. That it is not your Case alone: Did not the People of God take up the like Complaint? *The Harvest is past, the Summer is ended, and we are not saved.* Jer. 8. 20. The time when we expected Deliverance is over, and yet we are still where we were; our Afflictions are still lengthened out.

out. Was there not a time when *Zion* said,
 Isa. 49. 14. *The Lord hath forsaken me, my Lord hath for-*
gotten me? Was there not a time when *David*,
 after he had been long praying for Delive-
 Psa. 69. 3. *rance, and waiting, said, I am weary of my*
crying, my Throat is dried, mine Eyes fail, while
I wait for my God? Wherefore have no hard
 Thoughts of God, much less give way to
 murmuring against him, who deals no other-
 wise with you, than he often deals with many
 of his own.

2. Is not the Cause of God's respiting
 your Deliverance in your self? Are not you
 still unfit for Mercy? and is not that the
 true reason why you have it not? *God de-*
lighteth in Mercy, Mich. 7. 18. *He waiteth to*
be gracious, Isa. 30. 18. How ready God is
 to shew Mercy to us, when we are ready
 and prepared to receive it, he hath declared
 in the most pathetical way of Expression;
 Psa. 81. *O that my People had hearkened unto me, and*
 13,—16. *that Israel had walked in my Ways; I should*
soon have subdued their Enemies, and turned my
Hand against their Adversaries: The Haters of
the Lord should have submitted themselves unto
him; but their time should have endured for ever.
He should have fed them with the finest of the
Wheat, and with Honey out of the Rock should
I have satisfied thee. And to the same pur-
 pose is that, Isa. 48. 18. *O that thou hadst*
hearkened to my Commandments; then had thy
Peace been as a River, and thy Righteousness as
the Waves of the Sea,

So then we may thank our selves, that in our Afflictions we wait so long for Deliverance. Our Mercies never meet with any Obstructions in God, but in our selves. We by our Continuance in Sin, by our Remissness and Slackness in the Work of sound Humiliation and Reformation, retard and set back our Mercies; and then we complain and murmur, as if God were slack and unmindful of his Promises; as if he were hardly drawn to shew Mercy.

3. Deliverance out of Trouble is of God's free Grace; we cannot challenge it at his Hands. We bring our selves into Trouble by our Sins, and he may justly leave us to perish in our Troubles. He therefore who doth all that he doth for us out of free Mercy, may take his own time to do it, when he pleaseth. Is it fit that we who are unworthy of any good thing, who can demand nothing of him, should prescribe Times and Seasons to him; and as if we required a Debt of him, set him a Day when he should shew Mercy?

4. His own Time is the best Time. It may seem long to us that we wait, and still our Expectations are frustrated; but our long waiting shall turn to our greater Advantage in the end; and we shall then see, that if we had obtained our Mercies sooner, we should have had less Mercy in them. God's Mercies are then most sweet, and yield most full Content and Satisfaction, when they are fully ripe, and come in their proper Season.

'Tis

Is with them as with Fruit, if it be pick-
ed before it be ripe, it's either wholly un-
savory, or much less acceptable. O We lose
much of the Comfort of our Mercies, unless
we can be contented to wait for them till
they come to Maturity.

Object 4. Though my Afflictions be very
sharp, faith another, and such as would try the
Patience of any Man, yet I think I could bear them
without much complaining, if the Instruments of
my Sufferings were any other than such as they are.
To suffer by the Hands of such base and unworthy
Persons, is a Circumstance in which I cannot think
of without Indignation.

Ans. But it hath most times been
the Lot of the best Men. Now none Man
than David complained that it was the Song
of the Drunkards, Psalm 78. and that the
Subjects gathered themselves together against him.
Psalm 55. And Job said, what I hope I had
him in derision, whose Father he would have
damned to have for his children. Job 1. 12. We are not better than these
holy Men who met with this Measure in the
World.

2. God may wake what Instruments he
pleaseth to correct you with. Is it meet the
Child should chide the Rod with which the
Father should chasten him? It is not to be doubted that he makes
use of the fittest Instruments. Should I
Vex me that Heeds fooling, not complain against
him that rebuketh, this is to use such a
tough and grating Material, rather than
some

some clean, neat, smooth and gentle thing? If he should make use of such Materials as these, they would do no good: He knows those other are fittest to get off the Dirt and Filth, which stick so fast that gentle Means will not remove them. So God on purpose makes use of foul and rugged Instruments, as fittest to rub off that sinful Corruption and Filth that cleaveth so fast unto our Nature.

To be short; if we might be allowed to chuse the Instruments by which God should chasten us, we would be sure to chuse those from whose Hands we might smart least, and who would consequently do us least Good. 'Tis well for us, if we can think it so, that when God sees cause to correct us, he hath a right to chuse his Rod.

But here some might say, the Baseness of the object and contemptible Condition of the Persons from whom I suffer, doth not so much trouble me, as that they are those from whom I deserved better things? I have obliged them by whatever Kindnesses I was capable of conferring on them; and when they have served themselves of me, they kick at me. 'Tis not what I suffer from them, but their Ingratitude that I am impatient of enduring.

Ans. Ingratitude indeed is an odious Sin in whomsoever 'tis found; and usually God some time or other meets with the ungrateful Person, and pays him in his Coin. *Whoso soweth Evil for Good, Evil shall not depart from him.* Prov. 13.

from his House. 'Tis seldom seen but that first or last, he that hath been notoriously ungrateful to his Benefactors, hath the same Measure returned into his Bosom by those who have received Kindnesses from him.

But however, such odious Persons as these God makes use of; and many times he makes them the Instruments of his Corrections rather than others, because he sees no other so fit for his Purpose.

1. It may be sometimes in the good Offices we do others, we look more upon Man than upon God; we look more after Mens due Resentment of our Kindnesses, and their thankful Acknowledgments of them, and the answerable Returns they should make us, than after God's Acceptance of us therein. Were our Eyes more upon God, and less upon Men; did we shew Kindness, and perform Offices of Love to Man in obedience to God, and satisfy our selves with his Acceptance for the present, and encourage our selves with the Expectation of those Rewards of our sincere Obedience which he hath promised hereafter, we should neither be so often disappointed of those Returns which we expect from Men, neither should we be so much troubled at Disappointments in that kind when we meet with them. If Men prove thankful, we should take it well, and bless God for it; if they prove unthankful, we should quiet our selves in God's Acceptance of what we have done, as the chief thing which we looked after.

2. God

2. God may sometimes correct us by the Ingratitude of Men, that he may thereby mind us of our Ingratitude towards himself. Wherefore when Man's Ingratitude is so grievous and afflicting to us, let us reflect upon our selves, and think how much more displeasing our Ingratitude must needs be unto God, who hath done a thousand times more for us than ever we did for any Person living, whom we look upon as most obliged by us. If we therefore think we have just cause to complain of Man's Ingratitude towards us, how much greater cause hath God to complain of our Ingratitude towards him! in whom we live and move, and have our being, and from whose sole Bounty we have received whatever good thing we have at any time enjoyed, or do enjoy. And yet notwithstanding all these Obligations, what hath our whole Life been but one continued Course of Provocations, and an uninterrupted Series of those many ill Requitals which we have made him?

If we justify our selves, and say we cannot be justly charged with Unthankfulness towards God, we hereby plainly discover that we have never taken a just Account either of our Receipts from him, or of the Returns which he hath had from us.

Object. 5. *But I have a continual Succession and Series of Afflictions: God followeth me with one Trial after another: When one Affliction is but just over, presently another is in a readiness to seize upon me. I have no sooner obtained a little*
time

time to recover Breath, but I am again alarmed to prepare my self for a new Conflict. This is that which tireth out my Patience, and makes me even weary of my self.

Ans. 1. 'Tis possible that former Afflictions, though many and great, have not sufficiently humbled you, nor mortified Sin in you. Though something may have been done upon you, yet God hath not accomplished his whole Work upon you; so that what hath been begun by former Trials, he sees good to carry on yet further by what he still farther exerciseth you with.

2. 'Tis possible that by your unmeet and sinful Carriage, and the stirrings and breaking forth of Corruption in your Afflictions, you may have given God just occasion of bringing other Afflictions upon you. When being under God's Hand, he expects we should be humbled and reformed, then many times we discover more of the Pride, Stubborness and Incorrigibleness of our Hearts, than ever we did before. Thus it was with Ephraim, when God in order to his Humiliation and Reformation laid his Hand upon him; *When I would have healed Israel, then the Iniquity of Ephraim was discovered.*

Hosea 7. 1.

3. Though God's Corrections had for the present put some little Stop to your Sins, yet it may be afterwards you quickly returned to them again. And if we return to Sin, we need not count it strange that God should return to afflict us.

4. Though

4. Though there should be no new Provocation, yet God may afflict us again for Prevention. He sees the secret Frame and Disposition of your Heart. If there be but a Readiness and Preparation of Heart to return to Sin again upon any Occasion or Temptation offered, God who searcheth the Heart, discerneth this evil Frame thereof, and judgeth it necessary to stop the breaking forth thereof by some Affliction or other. To be sure God never returns to chasten, and renews his Witnesses against us, but when there is need; and therefore this we may certainly conclude, That whensoever he takes the Rod again into his Hand, there is a Cause whether we discern it or no. Wherefore if we must needs complain, let us complain against our selves: Let us complain of the desperate Wickedness of our Hearts, and the imporness of corrupt Nature, that calls for so many Blows. Let us complain of the strength of Sin within us, that needs so many Afflictions to break the Power of it, and subdue it. Let us complain, that after we have suffered so much, we should still be so bad; that so many Rods must be worn out upon us, and yet we are little the better.

Object 6. *But my Afflictions are such as I see not how they can ever do me any Good. If I see any probable Grounds of hope that they might prove beneficial to my Soul, and that I might be a Gainer by them in the end, then I think I could bear them more quietly. But when I can discern*

no Tendency that they have to my Good, how can I chuse but complain of my hard Lot, that I should be more grievously afflicted than many others, in such ways as from which no Advantage can redound unto me.

Ans^r. 1. If it should so be as you apprehend, that no Benefit could accrue to you, or was ever intended you by your Afflictions; if God should lay his Hand on you meerly because it pleaseth him so to deal with you; if he had no other end in afflicting you than only to use his Sovereignty and absolute Dominion over you; yet in that Case ought you quietly to submit. You are his Creature, the Work of his Hands, and *Prov. 16. 4.* he made you for himself. For his *Rev. 4. 11.* Pleasure you are and were created. And having made you for himself, and for his own Pleasure, have you any reason to complain of Wrong done you, if he deal with you as he pleaseth? What are you that you should think to be exempted from the common Condition of all Creatures, which is to be in Subjection to their Creator, and to be absolutely at his Disposal?

2. But yet this is not the Case; God is not wont to afflict us meerly to exercise his Dominion over us. He chastens us for our Profit, that he may make us *Heb. 12.* Partakers of his Holiness. This we are sure is his Design in his Chastisements. And the Assurance which he hath given us hereof in the general, should quiet us even when we cannot discover the particular end of his Corrections for the present

sent, much less perceive wherein our Afflictions are advantageous to us.

3. Whereas you say, you see not how you can receive any Benefit by your Afflictions; Why should you make your self wiser than God? Doth not he much better understand what Course is fittest to do you good, than you do? Will you so disparage his Wisdom as to say, he takes a wrong Course; and that unless he shall think of dealing with you in another manner, you shall never be the better for his Chastisements? If you grant that God is infinitely wise and good, you must believe that the Course which he takes with you is best, and shall not fail in the Issue to procure unto you all that Good which he intended you thereby.

4. What if it should so be that your Afflictions should already have done you much Good, though you discern it not? This is a thing that often is; we are in the dark, and the Benefit which we have received, and are still receiving by our Afflictions, is hid from our Eyes. Even they who most complain of the Fruitlessness of their Afflictions; yea that they are the worse for them rather than the better, do many times by their very Complaints discover the Benefit which by their Afflictions they have received. Their Complaints shew, that since they have been afflicted, they have had a deeper Sense of the Power and Prevalency of Sin in themselves, and of the Hardness of their Hearts, and of the Obstinacy and Rebellion of their corrupt Na-

ture. They had never so clear a Sight, or so lively a Sense of these things; neither did they ever so much take them to Heart, as since the Hand of God hath lain heavy on them. Now these are such evident and signal Fruits and Benefits of Affliction, as ought to be acknowledged with all Thankfulness.

5. So it is, that oft-times it seems good to the most wise God for a while to conceal from us his Intentions in afflicting us, to the end that he may thereby make us the more solicitous about his meaning therein, and that he may quicken us to a more diligent Enquiry and Search after the Cause of our Afflictions; and that we may the more earnestly and importunately seek unto him, and beg of him that he would be pleased to shew us why he contendeth with us, and lays his afflicting Hand on us; as also to help us to profit by our Afflictions. Wherefore if at any time we cannot discern God's End in afflicting us, much less see that we profit by our Afflictions, this should awaken us, and affect us so much the more; this should stir us up to make a more narrow Search after those Sins by which we have incurred God's Displeasure against us; it should incite us to pray the more, that God would enable us to improve our Afflictions to those Ends for which God lays them on us. This is the Use that we should make of it, when we can neither perceive that our Afflictions do us any Good, nor understand why God af-
flicts

licts us, and not presently conclude that we shall never be the better for our Afflictions.

6. The chief Benefit to be attained by Afflictions is to be expected afterwards, rather than in the time of our lying under the Chastnings of God. So much the Apostle hath given us to understand, *Heb. 12. 11. No chastning for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable Fruit of Righteousness to them that are exercised thereby.* Afflictions are spiritual Physick: Now Physick we know at present often discomposeth and disturbs Nature, and puts the whole Body out of Frame; it makes the Patient sick before it cures him: And so it is with the Physick of the Soul, you cannot discern the Benefit of it till it hath done working: It makes you sick for the present, but afterwards you come to see it was a good Sickness that made way for Health, and ended therein.

7. In the mean time, that you see not that you in some measure profit by your Afflictions, and that they are by degrees doing you good, is very much your own Fault.

(1.) You have a Prejudice against your Afflictions, you have an ill Opinion of those Courses which God takes with you for your Good; and this much hinders the kindly Operation of them upon you; as an ill Opinion of your Physician, or his Prescriptions, hinders the working of your Physick, and deprives you of much of the Benefit thereof.

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(2.) While you are under these Prejudices and perverse Misapprehensions, you do not apply your self to endeavour to profit by your Afflictions, improving God's Providences, and doing what in you lies to further the Success of the Means which he applies and makes use of for the Cure of your Soul. While your Prejudices continue, and you are thereupon still sluggish and unactive, how can you expect to be sensible of the Benefit of your Afflictions? Cast off your Prejudices; have good Thoughts of God's Methods of Cure; firmly believe that the Course which he takes with you is the best and fittest to do you good: arise, and be doing what you can towards the promoting of God's Design in afflicting you; search your Heart, try your Ways, endeavour to get a Sight of your Sins, a true Hatred of them, serious and firm Resolutions to forsake them; renew these your Resolutions often, still endeavour to confirm and strengthen them more and more; and above all, be earnest and incessant in Prayer to God that he would be pleased to bless your Endeavours; and then say if you see any Cause of complaining, that your Afflictions are such as can never do you any Good.



The Fifteenth Sermon.

L A M: 3. 40.

*Let us search and try our ways, and
turn again to the Lord.*

I Am now fallen upon the second part of the Text, setting before us our Duty in time of Affliction; *Let us search and try our Ways, and turn again to the Lord.*

The Duty is twofold: First, That *we search and try our Ways*: And secondly, That *we turn unto the Lord*.

The former of these Duties, as 'tis first in the Order of the Text, so 'tis in Nature. We must search after our Sins, find them out and discover them, and then turn away from them. 'Tis impossible that we should forsake them, until we have a sight of them. He who sees not his Sins, what should he else do but still go on boldly and fearlessly in the practice of them? What hath he to hinder him or reduce him? I shall speak something of both these Duties; and first of that which hath the first place in the Text.

But before I come to speak of the Duty it self, of searching and trying our Ways in time of Affliction, in order to the finding out of those our Sins, for which God hath laid his Hand upon us; I shall speak a little in a more general way, of that which is near of kin unto the Duty of the Text; I mean, of Self-reflection, or a looking back upon our selves, and a reviewing and consideration of our Thoughts, Words and Ways. And that which I shall say concerning it, shall be touching the Excellency and great Usefulness thereof, and touching the Mischiefs of the neglect of it.

I. As touching the Excellency of Self-reflection, or reviewing of our Thoughts, Words and Actions; I need say no more, than that 'tis a Perfection which only Men and Angels are capable of. All other Creatures, even those of them which are most perfect in their Kind, and seem to have, as it were, some Shadow and Resemblance of Reason in them, yet fall short of this excellent Perfection. They cannot review what they have done, or take into consideration the Quality of their past Actions; they cannot reckon with themselves, and call themselves to an account of them. And indeed they need not do so, for they are under no other Rule or Law beside that of their Nature, and those natural Instincts which God hath put into them; by these they are ruled and swayed, and according to these they act: They are under the

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Command of no moral Law, and consequently their Actions are not capable of moral Good or Evil. But Man being under a moral Law, and accountable to his Creator for the Breaches thereof, for the better regulating and ordering of his Thoughts, Words and Actions, according to the Prescriptions of that Law, God hath endowed him with a Faculty of reviewing his Actions, and of considering them with relation to the Rule; to the end that where he finds he hath done well, he may be comforted and encouraged; and where he hath done ill, he may be humbled and reformed.

Thus hath he a Tribunal within his own Breast, before which he can, as often as he pleaseth, summon himself to appear, demand an account of all that hath been done by himself, whether Good or Evil. At this Tribunal he can judge and pass Sentence, acquit or condemn himself according to the moral Nature and Quality of his Actions. Here he can rebuke and admonish as there shall be cause, recal and reduce himself where he hath gone astray, and lay stricter and severer Charges and Injunctions on himself of greater Care and Watchfulness for the future, as in respect of his former Negligence and Remissness shall be necessary.

A most excellent and never-sufficiently-admired Faculty of Man's Soul! What a rich Treasure have we herein, if we knew how to value it and make use of it! But alas, how little

little Improvement do we make to our selves of this noble Faculty!

And this brings me to the second Thing, the great Usefulness of Self-reflection. I have already, in what hath been spoken on the former Head, said something of the Usefulness of it in general. I shall now descend to some Particulars, and speak briefly to them.

1st. By reflecting on our selves, and taking a view of our past Actions, we come to know our selves: We understand the State and Condition of our Souls; what Case we are in, and what Opinion we ought to have of our selves. Hereby we come to be acquainted with our spiritual Concernments; whether we be in the State of Nature, or in the State of Grace; whether we be in the Way to Heaven, or in the Way to Hell. Hereby we come to know what our Declinings and Decays, what our Advances and Improvements in Grace are; whether we go forward or backward; whether it be better with us to day than 'twas yesterday, and this Week than 'twas last Week, or worse. Hereby we come to know the Sins that most prevail in us, and where our Weakness principally lies: Hereby we come to know our Wants and Defects, our Emptiness and Poverty in spiritual Things. And of how great Concernment and Advantage is it to know our selves! And how little will it avail us to know much abroad, while we are Strangers at home! To understand the World, and to be thorowly conversant in all the Matters of it,

it, perfectly acquainted with all the Affairs and Transactions thereof! To know all the Secrets of Nature, and to have exactly dived into, and found out all the hidden Causes of Things! To have made such successful Enquiries into Divine Truths, as to be able to discourse of them to Admiration, and to give an account of all the profound and deep Mysteries of our Religion! What would all this signify, if after a Man hath attained to know all other things, he should be ignorant of himself? unacquainted with the spiritual Affairs of his own Soul, which he is infinitely more concerned to understand? Surely whatsoever else a Man hath attained to know, if he knows not himself, he knows nothing to any purpose. And he that knows himself as he ought to know, need not be much troubled at it, though he know but little else.

2dly. By reflection on our selves we come to have the Comfort of our Estate, and of all our good Actions.

1. We hereby come to have the Comfort of our spiritual Estate. Though we should be in the State of Grace and Salvation, in the Favour of God, and in the Way that will undoubtedly bring us to Heaven; yet if we know it not, how can we take Comfort in it? And how can we ever know it, without Reflection on our selves, and a narrow Inspection into our Hearts and Ways? Some doubtful Conjectures we may make, some dark Guesses there may be concerning our Estate; but we can never come to attain any

any certain Knowledge, any clear, distinct and well-grounded Satisfaction touching our Condition, without a serious Reflection on our Souls, and a due search into, and consideration of our Hearts and Ways.

And indeed this is one great Cause, among others, of the small Comfort that many true Believers have in their Estate: They seldom reflect to any purpose on themselves; they seldom take any pains by diligent search and inquiry to satisfy themselves touching their Condition. Hence it comes to pass, that though they be found for the main, though they be in the right Way to Heaven, and are still going on in it slowly and leisurely; yet they are full of Fears, Doubtings and Dissatisfactions; and if they have sometimes a little Comfort in their Estate, yet they presently lose it again.

But now frequent and serious Reflections on themselves, and an exact Enquiry into their Estate, and a reviewing of Matters as they stand within them, and a taking an account of themselves, how would it after some time by degrees so clear up their Condition to them, as all their Fears would be banished, all the Cloudiness and Darkness of their Minds would be scattered, and their Doubtings and Dissatisfactions vanish! For we must take it for granted, that though there may be many great Weaknesses in Believers, and frequent Relapses into Sin; yet the constant Bent, unfeigned Desires, and serious Endeavours of the Soul, are in all things to please God.

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Now wheresoever this is, (and indeed without this there is no true Grace;) I say, wheresoever this is, a diligent and frequent Enquiry into our selves will discover it, and discover it so clearly, as a Man cannot but own it, and readily acknowledge, that amid many and great Weaknesses, there hath been all along some sincere and unfeigned Desire and Endeavour to please God in all things. Whence we may conclude, that as it cannot easily be, but that a sound and sincere Christian, who makes frequent Reflections on, and Enquiries into himself, should evidently discern his own Sincerity; so having discerned it, he cannot but have Comfort in it, at least according to the measure of the clearness of his discovery of it. Wherefore I say it again, one great Cause why many true Believers have so little Comfort in their Estates, is this, That they so seldom have any serious Reflections on themselves, or apply themselves to make a diligent Enquiry into their Estate. This, this is a great Reason why they walk so heavily and uncomfortably, why they are so often overwhelmed with Fears and Perplexities, why instead of continual Thanksgivings unto God for his rich Grace and unspeakable Mercy vouchsafed them, their Mouths are full of Complaints, and their Discourses made up of little else than sad discoveries of their inward Troubles and Dissatisfactions, and the Conflicts they continually have with Doubting and Unbelief. How much sound Comforts
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and Refreshings do we lose by being such Strangers at home? What Peace and Joy in believing! what increases of Faith, and further degrees of Establishment might we attain, if we were better acquainted with, and more conversant in this Self-reflection?

2. We hereby come to have the Comfort of all our good Actions. There is an inward Peace, Joy, Content and Satisfaction which usually attends sincere Obedience, notwithstanding the Infirmities accompanying us in the Performance thereof, and the manifold Imperfections of it: But much of this Comfort is lost for want of looking back and reviewing what we have done, and in what manner; with what sincere Desires to be accepted with God therein; with what Sense of and mourning over the Corruption cleaving to our best Actions, though we cannot be rid of it; with what Watchfulness and Opposition made against the Sin that dwelleth in us, which would interpose and mingle it self with every good thing we take in hand, with every Duty we perform. These things more or less are to be found, and may be observed in every sound Christian: and Matter of very great Comfort they are to him who can discover them in himself. But alas! neglecting to review our Actions, when they are over, instead of the Comforts we might have in ways of Obedience, too often nothing but Trouble and inward Regret follows. When we have done our best, we
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question our Sincerity in all that we have done, for the Workings of our corrupt Nature, and the sinful Imperfections of our Services come to our Remembrance, and are fresh in our Memories; but the Opposition we made against them is either hid from our Eyes, or forgotten: And all this for want of a serious Reflection on what hath past, and a careful reviewing of our Actions, together with the manner of them, and all their concomitant Circumstances. As reflecting on our Ways and reviewing our Actions, we never want Matter of Humiliation; so the upright and sound Christian never wants Matter of Comfort also in the Sincerity of his Heart. These two go together, and very well agree; a sight and sense of our Failings, with true Humiliation for them, and Comfort in the Uprightness of our Hearts amidst those Failings. The Truth is, these two are so far from being inconsistent, that we never have sounder Comfort in our Obedience, than when we most clearly discern and most heartily bewail our Failings. To see and mourn over our Defects, and yet even then to believe that God accepts of our weak but sincere Endeavours, through Christ: how doth this fill our Hearts not only with Joy, but humble Admiration, that God should have such Respect unto, and so kindly accept of such poor and worthless Services as we present him with, and that notwithstanding all the Stains and Blemishes that are upon them, for which he might most justly loath both us and them.

3. By

2. By Reflection on our selves we come to discover our Sins, and have a Sight of the Errors and Miscarriages of our Life. He who never reviews his Actions, nor considers what he hath done, how many Sins may he cherish, how many Abominations may he take Pleasure in, what Filthiness and Pollutions may he even wallow in, and take no notice of them, much less lay them to Heart? How quietly may he sleep in those Sins which without timely and sound Repentance will inevitably ruin him? How confidently and fool-hardily may such an one be hastning on in the way that leads to Destruction, and never come to have his Eyes open to discern his fearful Condition till he find himself to be in Hell? But now Reflection on our Hearts and Ways being a Means of opening our Eyes, and of bringing us to the Knowledge of our Sins, is attended with three unvaluable Benefits:

(1.) It quickens us to the Use of Means for obtaining the Pardon of those Sins, which without Pardon obtained, would eternally condemn us.

(2.) It's a Means of keeping off many temporal Evils which those Sins unrepented of might bring upon us in this World, or of mitigating those Afflictions which light upon us for them: For when we are soundly humbled for our Sins, and have obtained the Pardon of them, either God forbears to chasten us for them, according to that of

1 Cor. 11.

31.

If we would judge our selves, we should

should not be judged of the Lord; or the Sting of those his Chastisements being pluck'd out by Repentance, and Forgiveness obtained, they are much less bitter and grievous unto us; and we bear them more quietly and comfortably.

(3.) It prevents our running on in those Sins, and our heaping up still more and more Guilt upon our own Heads.

4. He that inureth himself to this Course of reflecting on himself, and communing with his own Heart daily, shall never want either good Company, or comfortable Employment.

1st. He shall never want good Company. In his most secret Retirements and greatest Solitariness, he will be good Company for himself. What Solomon saith of the Commandments of God; *When thou goest, they shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, they shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, they shall talk with thee.* That may be said of a Man who is much in reflecting upon himself, and communing with his own Heart; when he walks, he is a Companion to himself; when he lies him down to take his Rest, he sleeps with himself, he is his own Bed-fellow, he needs no other Company; and when he awakes, he talks with himself. If all others should withdraw and estrange themselves from him, yet he would not much complain as long as he hath such good Company within his own Breast. *A good Man, saith Solomon, shall be satisfied from himself.* He never enjoys himself better

Pro. 8. 12.

Pro. 4. 14.

than while he is at home, and conversant with himself. 'Tis not so with wicked Men, they hate to be at home, they cannot endure to be acquainted with themselves, they shun their own Company; the Conscience they have of their own Guilt, makes them afraid to look into their own Hearts. They run away from themselves as they would from an Enemy.

2dly. He never wants comfortable Employment: He could find Work enough within himself, though he had nothing to do abroad. He could with greatest Content and Satisfaction take up and entertain himself in communing with his own Heart; he is not afraid to look inward, or to know too much of himself: 'tis not an unpleasing and irksome thing to him to examine himself, and to take an Account of his own Actions; he is used to these things, and his Soul looks for them; and without them it can no more enjoy itself than a Man can live comfortably without the daily Recruits of Strength and Spirits, by moderate Sleep and wholesome Diet. If through any Avocation or Divertisement he be a Stranger to himself for a little time, he is as a Fish out of its proper Element. And that which will not easily be believed by those who have little Acquaintance with these things, even those Parts of this Work which seem to be most unacceptable, most troublesome and grievous, are pleasant and delightful to him. He is glad not only when he can discern and read his Evidences of
true

true Grace and Sincerity, but when by Search into himself he can find out the secret Hypocrisies that lurk in his Heart; when he can make Discovery of any Sin within him, which before he took no notice of. A Man would not have a Moth in his Cloaths, or a Thief in his Family, if he could chuse; but if they be there, he is glad when he finds them out, that he may be rid of them. So he that truly hates Sin, is glad when he can make Discovery of it in himself, that he may set himself against it, and subdue it, though indeed he should be more glad if it were not there to be discovered.

II. I come now to the Mischiefs of the Neglect of Self-reflection, and they are many and great; I shall mention some of them.

I. It is a Cause of hardning the Heart. There is scarce any thing that more conduceth to the keeping of the Heart soft and tender, than a frequent reviewing of our Actions, and calling our selves to an Account of what we have done. He who constantly observes this Course, who looks back and considers his Ways, reviews his Thoughts, Words and Actions, and reckons with himself for them daily, shall find that he is both more afraid of yielding to Temptations, and venturing upon Sin when it presents it self, and more troubled after the commission thereof: He can neither be so easily prevailed with to give way to Sin, nor be so quiet, so
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senseless and secure after he hath given way to it, or been overtaken with it: He usually closeth not with Sin freely and readily, but with some Reluctancy, and after some inward Conflicts with himself, and Resistance made against it: and having been worsted in the Conflict, and overcome, his awakened Conscience gives him no Rest until he hath been humbled for his Sin, and made his Peace with God. But he who seldom or never reflects on himself, or takes any account of his Ways, gives his Consent to the commission of Sin freely and readily, yea swallows it down greedily; and having so done, he also sleeps in it as soundly and securely for the most part: No Remorse, no inward Trouble takes hold of him to quicken him to Repentance, and hasten his Return to God. Thus I mean ordinarily it is with him, unless where some horrid Guilt awakens his Conscience, or God makes extraordinary Impressions of his Wrath upon the Soul.

2. Another Mischief of neglecting to reflect on our selves, is a daily Increase of Sin, and a treasuring up of Wrath against the Day of Wrath. This is an unavoidable Consequent of the former Mischief. When the Heart is once hardened, and a Brawniness grown over the Conscience, what should put a Stop to Sin? What should hold in corrupt Nature, or set any Bounds to the impetuous Workings, to the Excesses and Extravagancies of it? To an hardened Heart and a seared Conscience, neither the Evil of Sin in it self considered,

sidered, nor the Danger and dismal Consequents of it, nor the Threatnings of God, nor the Examples of his terrible Judgments upon others for Sin, will signify any thing. The Hardness of a Man's Heart, and the brawny Insensibleness of his Conscience, are as Armour of Proof against all these things. This woful Consequent of not reflecting on our selves, and requiring an Account of our Actions, we may gather from the Prophets Complaint concerning the obstinate and incorrigible Jews of his time: *No man repented Jer. 8. 6. him of his Wickedness, saying, What have I done? Every one turned to his Course, as the Horse rusheth into the Battel.* That Men ran on so desperately upon Sin, was because no Man said, *What have I done?* None reflected, called himself to an account of his Doings, or took into serious Consideration the woful Issues and Consequents of his sinful Courses.

3. Another Mischief hereof is, That the longer any Man neglects to look into his spiritual Estate, and consider his Doings, the more unwilling still he will be to reckon with himself. 'Tis with the Sinner in this Case as 'tis with a careless Merchant, who hath long neglected to sum up his Books, and to enquire in what Condition he is, whether he goes forward or backward in his Estate, whether he be a Loser or a Gainer by his Trading. If he hath long gone on in this careless way, and especially if he hath withal been lavish and prodigal in his Expences, he

will be very unwilling to acquaint himself with the true State of his Accounts. He is afraid he shall find himself in a bad Condition, and therefore he still goes on in his old careless way. So the longer the Sinner hath neglected to reckon with himself, the more unwelcome to him are the Thoughts of coming to an Account: His Conscience tells him he hath run far in Arrears with God, and therefore he shuns the Thoughts of looking over his Debts.

4. And yet without coming to a Reckoning, which is a further Mischief, and the greatest of all, he can never hope to have his Debts cancell'd or remitted. The Pardon of his many and grievous Sins will never be obtained, unless he judge himself for them, unless he be truly humbled for them, and forsake them. There is no Promise of Forgiveness upon any other Terms. But how far is he from this, who cannot endure to think of taking a View of his Sins, who hates the Knowledge of his Sins, and carefully shuns and avoids whatever might bring him to the Sight of them? Never dream of obtaining the Forgiveness of your Sins as long as 'tis thus with you. And if your Sins be not forgiven you, everlasting Misery will be your Portion, and it had been better for you if you had never been born.

To apply this briefly.

All you then who could never yet be persuaded to spend any Time, or take any Pains

Pains in looking into your selves, and reviewing your Actions, and the various Passages of your Life, what is it that makes you so unwilling to be acquainted with your selves, and so carefully to decline whatsoever might bring you to a right Understanding of the Estate of your Souls? Are you therefore better, because you do not know how bad you are? Is either your Sin or your Danger the less, because you do not see it? Is it any Security to you against the Judgments of God, that you turn away your Eyes from your Sins, and will not look upon them? If you were running on upon a Precipice, or a steep Place where you might break your Neck, would the blindfolding of your self, or the shutting of your Eyes preserve you? Would not your Danger be the same whether you see it or no? Is not your Danger so much the greater, and your Destruction, if you still go on, so much the more certain and inevitable, because you wilfully close your Eyes, that you may not be sensible of it? Remember your selves, and consider in what Rank God hath placed you. You are rational Creatures? Why then should you act so irrationally? God hath made you Men; Why should you make your selves like the Beasts that perish?

To take you off from this Folly, or rather Madness; I shall recommend only two things to your serious Consideration; and they are these.

1. God hath given you that excellent Faculty of Self-reflection, whereof I have been discoursing, that looking in upon your selves, and making discovery of your Sin and Danger, you might prevent your Ruin. Now if you wilfully refuse to make use of it, and on purpose either shut your Eyes, or turn them another way that you may not see your self, nor discover your Sin and Danger, how just will you Ruin be, and to whom can you impute the Cause of your Destruction but to your selves, who would wilfully run upon it? This may, perhaps, seem to have but little in it now; but Time will come when it shall be an Heart-piercing Consideration, that you should have procured all your Misery to your self, by obstinately refusing to make use of that Faculty of your Soul bestowed upon you on purpose, that reviewing your Sins, you might be sensible of the Misery that attends them, and use Means to escape it. We read of the Ostrich, that she leaveth her Eggs in the Earth, and warmeth them in the Dust; and forgetteth that the Foot may crush them, or that the wild Beast may break them; because God hath deprived her of Wisdom, neither hath he imparted to her Understanding. God hath not endued her with a Faculty of fore-seeing and providing against Danger. But it cannot be said of you, that God has not imparted to you Understanding; he hath given you Reason and Understanding enough to use Means for providing against your own Destruction,

Job 39. 14,
15, 17.

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on, but however you will run headlong upon it.

2. How averse soever you be now from reflecting on your self, hereafter you must reflect whether you will or no: Though you do what you can to close your Eyes for the present, yet the time is coming when you shall be enforced to open them. When God awakens your Conscience, and sets all your Sins in order before you, then it will not be in your Power not to reflect; your horrid Guilt and hideous Provocations, whithersoever you look, will still be full in your Eyes. This will certainly be either in this World, or in that which is to come: And O with what Horror and Consternation of Spirit will that Reflection be! *David's Condition* was sad, when he complained that his *Sin was ever before him*. His Thoughts were always upon it; it was continually in his Eye, and he could not be rid of it. What think you then of the Damned in Hell! How fearful will their Condition be, when all their Sins shall be laid before them, and be represented to them in their full Magnitude, and with all their Aggravations: and when their Minds shall be so intent upon them, and their Thoughts so continually taken up with them, as that there shall be no Intermision or Diversion for ever to give the least Mitigation of their Torments? When those dreadful and uncessant Reflections shall be, what would a Man then give to purchase a few Hours for Self-humbling and penitential Reflection in

Psal. 51. 3.

in order to the attaining of Forgiveness? If you have any sense of your Eternal Concernments, be perswaded to reflect now, and to do it seriously, that you may never have experience of the Horror and Dreadfulness of those After-reflections in another World.

And thus much of Self-reflection in the general. I now come to speak of it with relation to the time of Affliction; for to that Season hath the Exhortation in the Text reference, *Let us search and try our Ways*. These two words, *search* and *try*, import the same thing; and the Prophet useth two words to the same purpose, to note with what Diligence and Industry we must search, as I have before, in the Explication of the Words, observed. 'Tis indeed a diligent Search that each of the Words, taken severally, imports, and much more being joined together.

Which Diligence is in this Work requisite and necessary in several respects: and there is great reason why we should be urged to it.

I. 'Tis a Business we have no great mind to meddle with. 'Tis no easy matter to draw us on and engage us to set upon this Work of searching into our Hearts and Ways; we could more willingly be doing any thing else: And when we set about it, we are very apt to do it slightly and carelessly. For proof hereof, I need do no more than

than appeal to every Man's Conscience. How many are there who are so averse from it, that they could never yet be gotten to set about it? And as for others, that are not wholly Strangers to it, yet how seldom is it done by them, and how overly and slackly for the most part! Yea, though Affliction be the proper Season for it, and though then we are more concern'd to do it, and our present Exigencies should put us upon it; yet even then how often is it neglected, when no other Means from whence we think we may expect any Relief, are omitted?

2. Many of our Sins are not easily discerned; and therefore unless we search diligently, we are not likely to find them. There are divers Grounds of the Difficulty of finding out our Sins.

(1.) Our Ignorance in many things, and the false Notions and Principles concerning Good and Evil, which we have taken up and entertained. We are subject to many Mistakes, and are apt to call Evil Good, and Good Evil; to put *Darkness for Light, and Light for Darkness*, as the Prophet speaks, *Isa. 5. 20.* And the Principles and Opinions which have once gotten possession of us, are not easily relinquished or quitted, how un-sound soever. From the Influence and Force of such false Principles and Misprisions, 'tis that many live and die in some Sins, never coming to the sight of them: For if at any time they would look into their Estate, and search out

out their Sins, these their false Principles cast a Mist before their Eyes, and hinder them from making discovery of them. Tho there may be some true desire to find out their Sins, yet as long as their Errors and Mistakes remain with them, they search after them in vain.

(2.) The natural Self-love that is in every Man, is another thing that makes it difficult to find out our Sins. We are partial to our selves, and so favourable and indulgent in our own Case, that we are not competent Judges. Self-love blinds us, and makes us willing to overlook those Evils in our selves, which it may be we should not only observe, but severely censure in others.

(3.) Our Affection to Sin, and the Kindness we have for it, doth also increase the difficulty of finding it out. We love our Sins, and are unwilling to part with them; and this makes us unwilling to discover them. So though we search after them, yet 'tis but as an Officer searcheth after an Offender that is his Friend, or for whom he hath some Favour: He searcheth for him indeed, but as one who would not willingly light on him whom he searcheth for: He makes a diligent and narrow search where he knows he is not; but if he come near any place where he suspects he may lie hid, he is careful not to search that Place too narrowly. Much after this manner do we search after our Sins, especially our beloved Sins, which in regard of the intire Affection we bear them, we would

would still retain, whatever other Sins we part with.

(4.) Another Reason of the difficulty of discovering our Sins, is the Deceitfulness of Sin. Sin disguiseth it self, and puts on the Dresses and Habit of some other thing, that it may not be known. As Cheaters that wander up and down from Place to Place, shift their Cloaths, and call themselves by other Names, that they may not be discovered; so doth Sin often so dress it self up, as it counterfeits some Grace, and Vice calls it self by the Name of some Vertue. A strong Fanoxy, which is no better than Self-delusion, may be mistaken for true Faith; Lukewarmness and sinful Compliance may have the Appearance of Moderation and Christian Prudence; Stupidity and Unsensibleness under the Hand of God may pass for Patience; and the voluntary Hardships of Monkish Severities may be dressed up like Repentance, though they never reach the Change of the Heart and inner Man, in which true Repentance chiefly consists. And how often do Passion, Bitterness and Evil-speaking, put on the Attire and Disguise of Zeal! Many more such Instances might be given of Sin appearing in such Colours, and hiding it self under such Dresses, as it deceives not only others, but even the Sinner himself. Wherefore though in a Man's search into himself, he should meet his Sin full-but, as they say; yet meeting it so disguised, he takes no notice of it, but lets it pass, as a Man doth the

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Malefactor he is looking after, when he finds him not in that Apparel by which he was described. In all these Respects a diligent and narrow Search is necessary, if we be in earnest and truly desirous to find out our Sins.

From what hath been spoken touching the difficulty of discovering our Sins, we may infer,

1. That some convenient Time must be set apart for this Work, when a Man may wholly apply himself thereunto, and, when he may have nothing to distract or hinder him. If a Man will find out his Sins, he must search narrowly and carefully, as hath been said; he must look into every Corner of his Heart; he must survey and consider all his Ways, his Thoughts, Words and Actions, how he hath carried himself in his general or particular Calling; how he hath discharged every Trust; how he hath performed the Duties of every Relation in which he stands. Such a thorow Search as this will not easily be made; a few slight Thoughts or overly Reflections on himself while he is in a Croud of Business, while his Heart and Head are full of the World, will do little towards the discovery of all his Sins, many of which do not appear in open view, but so withdraw and hide themselves, as it will cost a Man some time and pains to get a sight of them.

2. That he who would so search after his Sins as to find them, must get his Heart affected

affected with a true hatred of Sin, and a sincere Willingness to forsake it. For though Sin must be found out before it can be forsaken, yet a Man must be willing to forsake it before he can readily find it out. The reason is, because so long as a Man is unwilling to leave his Sin, he will be unwilling to find it, and so will never seek narrowly and strictly after it. When once we are fully convinc'd of the Evil and Danger of Sin; when once we hate it unfeignedly, and are resolved to do our utmost to be rid of it, then shall we search after it with a Mind to find it; then shall we make the most diligent and impartial Enquiry into our selves, that it may not escape our Eye.

3. We may also further infer, That when we address our selves to this Work, we must be suspicious and jealous of our selves. We are too willing to favour our selves, and to indulge our selves in some particular Sins which have gotten an Interest in our Affections; and we are furnished with many Colours and Artifices to cover them over, and hide the Evil of them from our Eyes. 'Tis therefore safe and needful that we should suspect our false and deceitful Hearts, and deserve a continual Jealousy of our selves, lest we should be too favourable and kind to those Sins which lie nearest our Hearts, whether they be profitable or pleasurable Sins, or of what other Nature or Quality soever.

We may likewise hence be informed how much it concerns us to implore God's Assistance in this Business; that while we apply our selves to search and try our ways, he would be pleased to search and try us, as David's Prayer was, *Psal. 139. 23.* that he would discover our Sins to us, and give us a Sight of them; that he would help us against the Deceitfulness of our Hearts, and against our Self-love; that he would enable us to search so narrowly and impartially as we may not overlook our Sins: and more especially, that he would be pleased to discover to us those particular Sins for which he doth afflict us. Without this our Recourse to God in Prayer, and his Assistance obtained, all our Searching will be to little purpose.

Now in the next Place, the time of Affliction is a proper Season for this Duty. For,

1. Then God by his Chastisements doth as it were summon us to reflect and enquire after the Cause within our selves. *The Rod of God* hath a Voice, and it calls upon us for this Duty. Every Providence of God hath its proper Language, by which it remembers us of something that is expected from us; Mercies call for Joy and Thankfulness, and Afflictions for Reflection and Consideration: *Eccl. 7. 14.* *In the Day of Prosperity be joyful, but in the Day of Adversity consider.* We must then consider what God's Meaning and Intentions may be in laying such Afflictions on us, and what

what those our Sins may be for which he so corrects us.

2. 'Tis then seasonable to search and try our Ways, because that is the readiest and most effectual Course we can take for obtaining the Removal of our Afflictions; I mean, if we search and try our ways, in order to the finding out of our Sins, that we may forsake them, and accordingly forsake them when we have found them out: For the end of God's Chastisements being the taking away of our Sins, *Isa. 27. 9.* and the cleansing and purifying of us from the Defilements thereof, *Dan. 12. 10.* When God hath his End, we being turned from our evil Ways, he hath by many Promises assured us, that he will be at Peace with us. So *Jer. 3. 12.* *Return, O backsliding Israel, saith the Lord, and I will not cause mine Anger to fall upon you. When thou art in Tribulation, if thou turn to the Lord thy God, and shall be obedient to his Voice, he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, Deut. 4. 30, 31. Let the Wicked forsake his Way, and the unrighteous Man his Thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have Mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon, Isa. 55. 7.* Neither particular Persons only, but even whole Nations returning to the Lord, find Mercy with him for the averting or removing of his Judgments: *At what Instant I shall speak concerning a Nation, and concerning a Kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down; and to destroy it; If that Nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from their Evil,* *Jer. 18. 7, 8.*

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Hosea 6.1.

I will repent me of the Evil that I thought to do unto them. Hereupon the People of God sorely smitten and wounded, are encouraged to return to him, in Confidence of Healing if they return: *Come let us return unto the Lord, for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up.* How sad and deplorable soever their present Condition were, they made no question but all their Wounds should be healed, and all their Breaches should be made up, if they returned to God. But now what must lay the Foundation of their Return? or what must be the first step towards it, but a diligent Search after their Sins, by which they had departed from him? The Neglect hereof is that which continues and prolongs our Afflictions, whatever others Means we make use of to relieve our selves thereby. But of this more hereafter, when I come to speak of the second Duty in time of Affliction.

3. In time of Affliction we have some special Advantage towards the searching after and finding out of our Sins, which at other times we are destitute of.

1st. Afflictions abate the Vanity and Lightness of our Spirits, and make us serious, and so more fit to reflect on our selves, and consider our Ways. At other times our Minds will not be so easily fix'd, and our Thoughts held in and kept close, to a Work which is not very pleasing to us, and which we are apt to recoil from.

2^{dly}. Affliction makes our Hearts soft, as *Job* speaks; it makes Impressions of God's Displea-

Displeasure upon our Hearts, and makes us sensible of his Anger. When God several ways lays his Hand upon you, then you say with them, *Deut. 31. 17. Are not these things come upon us, because God is not amongst us? Because he in Displeasure hath withdrawn from us?*

3dly. Affliction makes us teachable, and willing to be informed of what is amiss; it makes us desirous to understand what 'tis for which God hath a Controversy with us. God speaks to Men in their Prosperity, and they will not hear, as he complained, *Jer. 22. 21. But Affliction, as God sanctifies it to them, makes them willing to hear and learn wherein they have offended. Then they beg of God that he would teach them, as Job did in his Affliction, saying, Make me to know my Transgression, and my Sin, chap. 17. 23. Then God shews them their Work and their Transgressions that they have exceeded, and openeth their Ear to Discipline, chap. 36. 9, 10.*

4thly. God in his Wisdom oft-times makes choice of such Afflictions to correct Men with, by which he, as it were, points at their Sin. When *Abisolom* and *Adonijah*, both of them their Father's Darlings, rose up against their Father, it was no hard Matter for *David* to discern what Sin of his God thereby intended to correct. He too fondly treated both the one and the other, and used much more Lenity and Indulgence towards them, than was meet; and by God's wise and just Permission they requite him accordingly.

This his Miscarriage *David* could not so well see before, for inordinate Affection and fond Love are blind; but now no doubt he saw and was made sensible of his Error in the Education of his Children. That God's Judgments and Chastisements are often such as the Sin which he punisheth or correcteth for, may be known by them, is most agreeable both unto Scriptures and Experience. How frequently may we observe, that such Children as have been stubborn and undutiful to their Parents, have afterwards been punished themselves with undutiful and rebellious Children: that false and unfaithful Servants have met with such themselves, when afterwards they have had Families of their own: that unthankful Persons have met with as ill Requitals from those who have received Kindnesses from them: that false and treacherous Friends have been betrayed by those on whose Friendship and Faithfulness they most depended? It seems good to the Wisdom of God so to order and dispose of the Circumstances of his Judgments or Chastisements, that either the Time, or the Place, or the Instrument, or the Manner, or the Matter and Object of them, have often some Correspondence with, and Relation to the Sin which he chiefly aims at.

(1.) God sometimes points out Mens Sin by the time he takes to punish them. A Man hath, it may be, often offended in the same kind; and God hath for the most part still discovered his Displeasure more or less, by
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somewhat that the Sinner hath met with, or hath befallen him, either at or presently upon the renewed commission of that Sin. At length he offends in the same kind more notoriously ; and immediately thereupon some more severe Ströke lights upon him from the Hand of God, than ever at any time before. When thus it is, what other Construction can a Man make of God's dealing with him, but that he is chastned for such a Sin? And as for Chastisements, so for the Judgments of God, they often light on Men either in the Act, or presently upon the Commission of their Sins! When *Nebuchadnezzar* was saying in the Pride of his Heart, *Is not this great Babylon which I have built for the House of my Kingdom, and by the Might of my Power, and for the Honour of my Majesty? While the Word was yet in the King's Mouth, there fell a Voice from Heaven, saying, O King Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken, The Kingdom is departed from thee: They shall drive thee from Men, and thy Dwelling shall be with the Beasts of the Field, and they shall make thee eat Grass as Oxen. And the same Hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar.* So afterwards when *Belshazzar* was profanely carouzing and drinking Wine in the Golden Vessels of the Temple, and praising his gods of Gold and Silver, of Brass and of Iron, and of Wood and of Stone: In the same Hour came forth Fingers of a Man's Hand, and wrote upon the Phaister of the Wall that Judgment which God had decreed should light upon the King; and which ac-

Dan. 4. 30.
31. 32. 33.

Dan 5. 3.
4. 5. 30.

Acts 12. 21,
22, 23.

cordingly that same Night was put in Execution. And thus *Herod*, as soon as he had finished his Oration, and received the Applauses of the People, crying out, *It is the Voice of a God, and not of a Man: Immediately the Angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the Glory: and he was eaten of Worms, and gave up the Ghost.*

2 Kings 9.
36.

(2.) Sometimes the Judgments or Chastisements of God light upon Men in the very Place where they formerly had offended. So God threatned to requite *Abab* in that Plat, in that very Plat of Ground where he had sinned. So whereas the *Israelites* had highly provoked God to Anger, by building high Places in *Tophet* for their Idolatrous Worship, and by burning their Sons and their Daughters in the Fire there; God threatned there to punish them for their Idolatry and Cruelty: Thus saith the Lord, *The Days come that it shall no more be called Tophet, or the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter: for they shall bury in Tophet, till there be no Place; and the Carcases of the People shall be Meat for the Fowls of the Heaven, and for the Beasts of the Earth, and none shall fray them away.*

Jer. 7. 31,
32, 33.

Judg. 7.

(3.) The Instruments by which God punisheth Men, are sometimes the same which were the Instruments of their Sin. Thus the *Sichemites* whom *Abimelech* made use of as his Instruments and Assistants in slaying his Brethren, were afterwards, through God's righteous Judgment, a Means of the Destruction of *Abimelech* himself.

(4.) God

(4.) God often punisheth Men in such a manner as bears some Resemblance with their Sin. The Scripture is full of Instances hereof. If *Jacob* deceive his aged Father, and make him believe he is his eldest Son *Esau*, and so steal away the Blessing from his Brother, *Laban* shall deceive him much in the like manner, giving him *Leab* to Wife instead of *Rachel*. If *David* first commit Adultery with *Bathsheba*, and then contrive the murdering of *Uriah* for the concealing thereof, his Son *Absholom* shall be permitted to lie with his Father's Concubines, as he had done with the Wife of *Uriah*; and as he had slain *Uriah* by the Sword of the Children of *Ammon*, so the Sword shall never depart from his House. If *Abab* and *Jezebel* take away the Life of *Naboth*, because he would not part with his Vineyard, and the Dogs do lick his Blood; the Sentence of *Abab* from the Mouth of the Lord shall be, *In the Place where Dogs licked the Blood of Naboth, shall Dogs lick thy Blood, even thine*, 1 Kings 21. 19. And the Dogs shall eat *Jezebel* by the Wall of *Jezreel*: and him that dieth of *Ahab* in the City, Dogs shall eat: and him that dieth in the Field shall the Fowls of the Air eat, ver. 23, 24. If *Nadab* and *Abihu*; If the two hundred and fifty Men which were the Complices of *Corab*, *Dathan* and *Abiram*, presume to offer strange Fire before the Lord; by strange Fire, by a Fire coming up from before the Lord shall they be consumed. If the *Israelites* burn Incense to the Queen of Heaven upon the Tops

Gen. 29.

23.

2 Sam. 12.

10, 11, 12.

Levit. 10.

1, 2.

Numb. 16.

35.

Jer 19. 13.

of their Houses, their Houses shall be set on fire, and burnt down by the Enemy. As the Sword of *Agag* the King of the *Amalekites* had made many Women childless, so must his Mother be childless among Women, *1 Sam. 15. 33.*

(5.) God punisheth Men in the Matter or Object in which they have sinned. If *David* be proud of the Multitude of his People, and out of the Pride of his Heart will have them numbred, God will chasten him by diminishing his People; threescore and ten thousand of them shall die by the Pestilence. If *Jebozaphat* join himself with wicked *Abaziah* King of *Israel*, and in compliance with him builds Ships that they may go to *Tarshish*, his Ships shall be broken, and his Purposes shall be disappointed. Thus we have in many Instances seen the Truth of what was spoken, That God often makes choice of such Punishments as point at the Sin for which they were inflicted.

2 Sam. 24. 15.

2 Chron. 30. 35, 36, 37.

The Sixteenth Sermon.

L A M: 3. 40.

*Let us search and try our ways, and
turn again to the Lord.*

THis God doth for several Reasons.

1. To convince those who are obstinately blind, and will not see their Sins, nor own the Evils that light on them, to be the Punishments of those Sins. Men are naturally so, unwilling to acknowledge their own Guilt, and that they suffer for their Sins, that they endeavour to make any other Construction of those Evils which befall them, rather than to yield that God thereby intended to punish them for their Transgressions. Sometimes they will impute all to the Malice of second Causes and the Instruments of their Sufferings, never looking so high as God, without whom no Creature could touch them: Sometimes they will fancy that such Evils light upon them by chance, and not by Divine Providence ordering them for their Punishment or Correction. But now when God's Dealings bear such a Resemblance of,
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and Correspondence with their Sins, they are forced to see and acknowledge their Sins, and the exact Justice of God in their Punishment. A remarkable Example hereof we have in *Adonibezek*, who when his Thumbs and great Toes were cut off, was thereby enforced to give Glory to God's Justice, saying, *Threescore and ten Kings having their Thumbs and great Toes cut off, gathered their Meat under my Table: as I have done, so God hath required me.*

Judg. 1.7.

2. To help the Weakness of those who are in some measure willing to see their Sins, and to discern God's End in his Corrections, but cannot do it so easily, unless something in the Correction it self lead them to the Sight of their Sin. Thus when a Man suffers in the same kind in which he hath been injurious to others, or when a Man loseth by those unlawful Artifices by which he made account to increase his Gain, he cannot but take notice of his Sin in the Punishment, which otherwise perhaps he would have overlook'd.

3. God hereby makes the Chastisement work more kindly and effectually. For these Circumstances pointing at a Man's Sin so evidently, do add much to the smarting of the Rod with which God corrects, and makes Men take his Chastisements the more to Heart. And all this stirs up more earnest Desires and Endeavours to answer the end of his Corrections. Physicians when they give gentle Physick, or have to do either with obstinate

obstinate or sluggish Bodies, put in somewhat to animate and quicken the Operation of their Prescriptions: So God by these Circumstances so directly pointing at a Man's Sin, quickens the Operation of his spiritual Physick, which without these Circumstances would little affect the Patient, or stir those bad Humours which are to be carried off.

4. God hereby sometimes intends also the Vindication of his Justice and Holiness before the World. When Men have sinned grievously and openly, so as the World hath taken notice of it, God will have the World also take notice of his Severity against such Sins: and to that end he writes the Sin in fair and legible Characters upon the Punishment, so as all that pass by may say, *Verily, there is a God that judgeth in the Earth.* But now if God should not thus point at the Sin by the Punishment, many who took notice of the Sin would never take notice of the Punishment thereof; and consequently God's Hatred of Sin, and his Severity against it, would not so manifestly appear. For though God should inflict as severe a Punishment on the Sinner in some other kind, yet few would understand what Sin God thereby intended to punish; and so his Justice and Holiness would be as little vindicated in the Judgment of the greatest part of those who had taken notice of the Sin, as if he had not punished the Sin at all.

5. God

5. God thus points at the Sin by the Punishment, to give warning to others, that they may take heed how they venture upon those Sins which they see are so odious unto God, and so severely and remarkably punished by him; that others may see and fear, *and do no more any such Wickedness*, as God speaks touching the end of the Execution of Vindictive Justice by the Magistrate. So then to return to that which gave occasion of all that hath been said concerning the several Ways of God's pointing at the Sin by the Punishment; by what hath been said it appears that our Afflictions are a special help to lead us to the sight of our Sins; and therefore in that respect as well as in others, the time of Affliction is the meetest Season for searching and trying our Ways. By the help that our Afflictions then afford us, we may then find out those Sins which at another time we should not so easily discover.

Deut. 13.
11.

Now to apply what hath been spoken in a Word or two.

Use 1. If this searching and trying of our Ways in order to the finding out and forsaking of our Sins, be the special Duty, the great Work required of us in time of Affliction, how is it that this Work is for the most part least thought of? How is it that there is so much complaining among us, but so little Searching? so much enquiring after Remedies, and whatsoever other means may afford

ford us Relief, but so little Enquiry after our Sins that obstruct the Operation, and blast the Success of all other Means? How is it that this searching and trying our Ways, which should be the first thing we do in time of Affliction, is commonly the last? The last did I say? Yea rather, how is it that it is for the most part wholly omitted, even when no other Means that can be thought of are omitted? How is it that many Afflictions succeeding one after another, do so hardly bring us to this searching and trying our Ways at last? Surely, if there were nothing else to prove the Excellency and Usefulness of this Work, yet this were enough, that our corrupt Nature is so extremely averse from it. Such untoward Hearts and Natures have we, that the best things are most unacceptable, and most against the hair to us. Could we be persuaded to make this our first Business when any Affliction first arrests us, how many Trials might we avoid? And how much might we either shorten or sweeten those which God sees good to exercise us with? Consider the evil Consequents of our Neglect of this Duty.

1st. By Neglect hereof we do what in us lies that God may lose the end of his Corrections.

2^{dly}. We lose the Benefit of them.

3^{dly}. We either lengthen out present Afflictions, or make way for others to succeed, if these should be removed. Now what ex-
stream

tream Folly is it to run upon these great Evils, rather than put our selves to the Trouble of taking that Course which God puts us upon for our speedy and effectual Relief? What is it that makes us so unwilling? Is it the Unpleasingness of the Work? But all good things are so to our sinful Nature.

Use 2. Let not the difficulty of this Work discourage you. What is displeasing at first, will become pleasant and delightful after you shall have been inured to it.

Is it your Love to some particular Sin, and your Unwillingness to leave it? If that be at the bottom, take heed of it; you do but harbour a Snake in your Bosom, that will sting you to Death if you still cherish it: that Sin, as dearly as you love it, will certainly be your Ruin, unless you find it out and forsake it.

Is it your Sloth and Unwillingness to be at the Cost of so much Pains, as a narrow Search into your Heart and Ways would require? But,

(1.) Can you take pains to better Purpose? Is there any thing in the World that better deserves your Pains?

(2.) Do you not take a great deal more Pains about Matters of small Consequence, in comparison of what concerns your Soul, and your Peace with God? Can you be content to lay out your Strength and spend your Spirits in pursuit of the things of the World,

World, and yet stick at a little Pains to be taken about your spiritual Estate? Have you not some time heretofore taken a great deal more Pains in pursuit of Sin and sinful Vanities, than the searching into your Heart and Ways need cost you? Have you not often tired your self in the Ways of Sin with greatest Delight; and yet are you so nice and tender, so indulgent and favourable to your self, as you cannot now be perswaded to be at the Expence of a little Pains to enquire how Matters stand between God and your Soul? If this be your Temper, you must not think of going to Heaven upon these Terms: You must resolve to take Pains, or you shall never get thither. There must be *striving to enter in at the strait Gate*; and *working out your Salvation with Fear and Trembling*; and *seeking the Kingdom of Heaven by Violence*, or you will fall short of it. What say you to these things? Are you at length perswaded and resolved to take some Pains to make a strict Search into your self? And is it the full Purpose of your Heart to overlook no Sin, that by your most diligent and impartial Enquiry you can discover? Then for your Direction herein,

1. Make use of that Help which the Circumstances of God's Chastisements offer you. Try what you may thence gain towards the Discovery of the Sin whereby you have provoked God to afflict you.

1st. Con-

1st. Consider the Circumstance of time when God was first pleased to lay his Hand upon you. Enquire what you had been then doing, and whether your Affliction did not arrest you even while you were acting Sin in one kind or other, or whether it did not follow some Sin at the Heels.

2^{dly}. Enquire whether the Place where your Affliction seized on you, were not that in which you had sinned. It may be it seized on you in your Shop, where you had been cheating some Body; in the Ale-house, where you had been mispending your time, and abusing your self by Intemperance; or it may be in some other Place as bad or worse.

3^{dly}. Consider the Instruments of your Affliction. Doth not God punish you by those who were your Companions in Sin? or whose Assistance you made use of for the commission of your Sin? Doth he not take those very things with which you sinned, and make them the Instruments of your Suffering?

4^{thly}. Enquire whether there be nothing in the manner of God's chastening you, that may lead you to the Sight of your Sin. He hath chastened you with the Scourge of the Tongue; have not you abused your Tongue to the defaming and injuring of others in the same kind? You have mer with false and deceitful Dealings from those whom you thought you might have trusted: Have not you been as false and deceitful your self?

And

And doth not God measure to you according to the Measure that others have received from you? God lays bodily Weaknesses and Infirmities on you: Are they not the proper Effects of your Intemperance, and other lewd and debauched Courses, by which you have brought those Distempers and Weaknesses upon you? God afflicts you in your Children: Have not you set your Affections too much upon them? Or have you not neglected them in their Education? Or have you not given them ill Example?

sibly. Consider the Matter and Object of your Affliction, and see if that may not help you to see your Sin. God hath taken away part of your Estate from you: When you had more than now you have, did you not abuse it? God hath blasted your Beauty: Were you not proud of it? God hath poured Reproach and Contempt upon you: Did you not forfeit your good Name and Reputation, and make your self vile by your Sins? Have you not dishonoured God, for which he hath justly made you to be lightly esteemed?

2. Compare your self with the Rule; lay the Law of God before you, and try your self thereby in reference to all the several Branches thereof. *By the Law comes the* Rom. 3: Knowledge of Sin. And here rest not in Generalities, but descend to Particulars. Take an Account of your self, and make Enquiry wherein you have declined or swerved from any part of that Duty which God requires

Mat. 19.
26.

of you. He that lays any one of God's Laws before him, taking only the general Letter of it as 'tis express'd in the Commandment, may think he hath not much failed of the Performance of what the Law requires; yea perhaps he may be ready to justify himself, saying with the young Man in the Gospel, *All this have I kept from my Youth*: And yet when he comes to look more narrowly into the several Parts of this Duty contained under that Law, he may find he hath offended many ways, and that he hath not only come far short of exact Conformity to the Rule, but faileth more or less in almost every thing that the Law requires, excepting only those fouler Acts of Sin which in the Letter of some of the Commandments are by Name forbidden.

3. In this Search be sure that you avoid that common Error of heeding and looking after Sins of Commission only, little or not at all regarding Sins of Omission. Tho' we make light of our Omissions, yet they may be such as God may be highly provoked by them.

To neglect Prayer in your Family, and the Instruction of those that are under your Charge, may be small Sins in your Account, and scarce worth the taking notice of. But they are not so in God's Account: He sees that the Omission of these Duties is the ready way to bring upon us a Deluge of Profaneness, Irreligion and Atheism: and that they who make no Conscience of these Duties, do in effect say unto God, *Depart from us*; they

they do what in them lies to banish God, not only out of their Families, but out of the Land: For if these Duties should be as shamefully neglected by all as they are by some, and those too many, what would become of our Posterity in the next Generation? Would not the whole Face of the Land be covered with Darkneſs as thick as that of Egypt? And what would attend that Darkneſs, but all manner of Ungodlineſs and Debauchery, the inſeparable Conſequents of Ignorance?

The total Omiſſion of ſecret Prayer you may think is no great Matter, ſo long as you ſometimes in publick or private join with others in that Duty: but God hath other Thoughts of it; he knows that all your other Services, as by you performed, are little better than meer Formalities, as long as you neglect ſecret Duties. He knows the great Conſequence of keeping up a conſtant Courſe of ſecret Prayer, and that without it 'tis impoſſible that either your Heart or Converſation ſhould be ordered aright. He knows that the very Life and Vigour of all other Duties depends on this.

The Neglect of ſhewing Mercy to thoſe that are afflicted, you may think is no great Matter, ſo long as you do no Man any Wrong; but God lays more Streſs upon ſuch Omiſſions than you do; his righteous Sentence is, He that hath no Pity for Prov. 21. others, ſhall have none himſelf; He ſhall 13. have Judgment without Mercy, that hath ſhew- Jam. 2. 13. ed no Mercy.

Exod. 4.
24, 25, 26.

The Neglect of some one publick Ordinance, as the Lord's Supper for example, you may think is a thing that God takes little notice of, so long as you give your constant Attendance on other Ordinances: but you consider not how much Evil and Danger there is in the deliberate and wilful Omission of any known Duty, and such is this. For such an Omission as this was *Moses* in Danger of losing his Life; for neglecting to circumcise his Son, *the Lord met him*, took hold of him, and sought to kill him: neither would he let him go, till *Zipporah* his Wife had taken a sharp Stone, and cut off the Fore-skin of her Son. Neither may you think that any colourable Excuse that you may pretend you have for Neglect of a Duty or an Ordinance, will bear you out. *Moses* in probability might have pleaded something for his Excuse; his Wife *Zipporah*, as it seems by her Carriage, was extremely averse from having her Son circumcised, so that *Moses* could not do it, but there would be a Breach between them; there would be no Quiet in the Family. This Consideration had been somewhat, if the thing had been of an indifferent Nature, and not a Matter of Duty: but where God's express Command was, That every Male-child should be Circumcised, this Excuse could not justify *Moses* his Neglect. Look well to it that your Excuses be good, by which you would defend your absenting your self from any Ordinance of God. It had need be a strong and a clear Ground on which

which you go, when you shall willingly and upon Deliberation wave an expresse Ordinance of God. But this by the way.

4. Think not you have done enough if you have been searching within, and round about you near at hand; if you have with some Diligence enquired how Matters are with you at present, or have been of late; but look farther off, and survey the former part of your past Life : God may call to remembrance Sins long since committed, and chasten you for them. Thus God brought a Famine of three Years continuance upon the *Iraelites*, for *Saul's* Cruelty against the *Gibec- 2 Sam. nites*, though *Saul* had then been dead many *21. 1.* Years. Yea, God may chasten you for old Sins, though you have long since left them; and this for several Reasons.

1st. Though you have left them, yet it may be that you never truly repented of them. A Man may break off the Practice of some Sins, because they consist not with his temporal Advantage, or his Credit, or his worldly Designs and Interest. Upon such Considerations as these a Man may have forsaken some particular Sins, though he never hated them, nor was truly humbled for them.

2^{dly}. A Man may have truly repented of his Sin, he may have been truly humbled for it, and forsaken it, and yet he may still want some Degrees of that thorow Humiliation which God expecteth.

3dly. Former Sins, long since committed and forsaken, may now be almost forgotten; at least they may not be remembred with that fresh and lively Sense of the great Evil and Heinousness of them, with that mourning over them, and loathing of our selves for them, as heretofore.

4tly. God may see that you are in Danger of returning to those Sins again, that you have long since forsaken, and verily thought your self at so great a distance from them, as you should never have any Inclination to commit them again. So then 'tis possible that God may afflict you for old Sins, long since forsaken upon some worldly Consideration, that he may bring you to sound Repentance for them; or that he may more throughly humble you for the Sins that you have truly repented of; or that he may thereby rub up and renew the Remembrance of former Sins, and therewith also renew your former Sorrow, and loathing of your self for those Sins, which Time and Forgetfulness, and carnal Security, have almost worn out; and lastly, that he may prevent your Relapses into the same Sins. Thus you see that God may have many Reasons to correct you for former Sins? and therefore that if you will find out the Sin for which he chastens you, it will sometimes concern you to cast your Eye far back, and take a View of those your former Sins, which you have long ago quitted and relinquished.

5. This searching and trying your Ways is a Work that must be often repeated ; and that not only in regard that you every Day contract new Guilt, and run afresh in Ar-rears with God, but because your former Sins may not be discovered presently, though you search after them with some good measure of Care and Diligence. When we search after a thing which much concerns us to find, though we light not on it at first, yet we search a second and a third time, and will not easily give over searching until we have found it. You have been making Search after the Sin for which God afflicts you, and you cannot find it ; you are still in the dark, and cannot understand God's Intentions in laying his Hand upon you : But search yet once more, yea a third and a fourth time, if need be ; you may light on that at last which you have often overlook'd. Whatever the Issue of your Enquiry be, you will not lose your Labour. He who digged up all his Vineyard, in hope to find the Treasure which he had been told was hid there, though he found not the Treasure he look'd after, yet he had it in another kind which he expected not : the loosening and mellowing of the Earth brought him in a more plentiful Vintage the next Year. If by your Search you should not at last discover any one particular Sin, which you can think God aimed at in the Affliction which he hath laid upon you, yet you may light on somewhat else which may requite your Pains. If no other

Benefit accrue to you, yet the Satisfaction you have in having used so much Diligence in reviewing the former Passages of your Life, will be a sufficient Recompence of the Trouble you have been at therein. But yet this is not all ; there are divers other certain Advantages which redound to us from taking a view of our former Sins, and which, if it be done in a due manner, we never fail of attaining, though we find not the particular Sin which we look'd after. It makes us more humble ; it raiseth our Esteem and Valuation of Christ ; it fills us with Admiration of the free Grace and rich Mercy of God in pardoning so many and so great Sins ; it inflames our Love, and increaseth our Thankfulness to God ; and it quickens us to more Care and Watchfulness, to a more constant and serious Endeavour of sincere and universal Obedience for the time to come.

Now though it be most seasonable to search and try our Ways in time of Affliction, yet there are also some other special Seasons for this Duty. As,

1. At any time when we are in any great Fear or Danger ; then though God doth not yet strike us, yet he shakes his Rod over us ; and therefore to prevent what may be coming upon us, and to avert those Evils which we fear, there can be no better Course than that we make a through Search after those our Sins, for which God seems to threaten us.

2. After

2. After a Man hath fallen into any great Sin: Such Falls do for the most part fore-run some Affliction, and make for the present a Breach between God and us: For the closing up of which Breach, and renewing of our Peace with God, it will concern us not only to be humbled for that particular Sin, but to make diligent Enquiry after such other Sins as may interpose between God and us, and deprive us of the Light of his Countenance, and the Sense of his Love.

3. When we are in Expectation of, or Suitors unto God for any special Mercy, For considering that our Sins separate between God and us, and withhold good things from us, nothing can be more seasonable or necessary, than that when we are waiting on God for any special Favour, we carefully search and try our Ways, that no Sin may hinder our Mercies, obstruct the Passage of them to us, or blast the Means which we make use of for obtaining them.

4. Before our more solemn and extraordinary Approaches unto God; as namely, before our drawing near unto the Table of the Lord. God will be sanctified in all our Approaches unto him; but especially in our most solemn Approaches. And in particular, as concerning our drawing near unto the Table of the Lord, a more than ordinary Search into our selves at that time, is in several Respects seasonable.

1 Cor. 11. 28. (1.) In regard of the exprefs Command of God : *Let a Man examine himself, and so let him eat of that Bread, and drink of that Cup.*

Ver. 29. (2.) In regard of the great Danger of coming unworthily : *He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh Damnation to himself.* Now unless a Man search and try his Heart and Ways, how can he know whether he be an unworthy Receiver or no? He must needs run a great Hazard who comes Hand over Head, before he hath enquired into himself, whether he be a meet Guest for the Table of the Lord or not. Yea 'tis very much to be feared, that he who is so careless as that he never enquires into his Fitness, comes unpreparedly, and eats and drinks unworthily.

(3.) In regard of the great Benefits which we shall reap thereby, and the Usefulness thereof, in relation to the Sacrament.

1st. In that Ordinance we are to bewail and mourn over our Sins; we must come to it with godly Sorrow for them : And how can that be unless we know them? And how can we come to know them, unless we search after them? 'Tis the reviewing of our Actions that sets before us the Sins for which we are to be humbled, and affects our Hearts with them.

2^{dly}. We are at that Ordinance to renew our Covenant with God, and to take up fresh Resolutions of cleaving to him with full purpose of Heart for the future. And what is more conducing hereunto, than that we by
a nar-

a narrow Search into our selves, be informed how and wherein, we have departed from God, and broken Covenant with him?

3dly. We are there to act Faith on Christ for the Pardon of our Sins; and we there expect to have the Pardon of them sealed unto us: in both which Respects it is then most seasonable and requisite that we should look back and take a Survey of our former Sins. For,

1. Hereby we shall come to know what, and how many and great those Sins are, for the Pardon whereof we are to act Faith on Christ.

2. We shall be the better able to value that Pardon of so many and so great Sins which he is pleased in that Ordinance to seal to us; and consequently we shall the better understand how much Love and Thankfulness is due from us, both unto Christ who hath with his Blood purchased the Pardon of our Sins for us, and to God the Father, who for Christ's sake hath bestowed it on us.

4thly. If this Search and Trial of our selves were constantly and duly made before the Sacrament, of how great Advantage would it be towards our Growth and Increase in Grace? By this Course we should,

(1.) Discover whether we thrive in Grace or no; we should evidently perceive whether it be better or worse with us since our

our last appearing before the Lord at his Table.

(2.) We should with Thankfulness acknowledge any further Degrees of Grace or Strength against Corruption that we have attained.

(3.) We should be humbled for our Backslidings and Declinings after our solemn Engagements to the contrary, at our last partaking at the Table of the Lord.

(4.) We should renew and strengthen our Resolutions against our Sins, and engage our selves to a more conscientious Performance of whatsoever Duties God requires of us.

If any Man think there is small Benefit to be expected from such a Course, he is certainly one who hath been little acquainted with it, or hath not observed it with Care and Constancy. Many of those who come to that Ordinance, make no Conscience at all of preparing themselves, but (as 'tis to be feared) rush upon it inconsiderately and prophanely. Others prepare themselves but overly and carelessly; or if sometimes they take more Pains than ordinary in searching and trying their Ways, and in other Parts of that Preparation which is requisite for a due Attendance on God in that Ordinance, yet 'tis but very seldom that they are at this Pains. For the most part they suffer one thing or other to divert them, and take them off from bestowing time that way; and so the great Business of preparing themselves being

put

put off to the last, is but half done, or as good as wholly omitted. Reflect and ask your own Conscience how it hath been with you; and if you find this to have been your very Case, then never object that there is little Advantage from such a Course, until you have practised it better and with more Constancy.

But to return to the Business of the Text, the searching and trying our Ways in time of any extraordinary Affliction.

You will say, perhaps, you have searched and done it with all the Seriousness and Diligence you could, and earnestly implored God's Assistance therein; and this you have done often, and yet you cannot understand what particular Sin or Sins God aims at in the Afflictions which it hath pleased him to lay upon you. You discover Multitudes of Sins that you have been guilty of; but among them all to discern which they are which God at present corrects you for above others, is that which by all your Enquiry you cannot attain.

Ans. I answer, It may so be, that you cannot single out any one particular Sin; neither, it may be, did God ever intend it: He sometimes by Afflictions intends to humble you for Sin in general; to correct your general Carelessness and Slackness in the whole Course of your Life; and to engage you to walk every way more strictly and humbly before him.

He

He intends also perhaps to mind you of old Sins which you have almost forgotten, and to provoke you to renew your Repentance and Humiliation for them.

Wherefore when at any time you cannot find out any particular Sin, for which above others God should at present have a Controversy with you, fall upon Sin in the general, and improve your Affliction towards the attaining of greater Measures of Humiliation and Reformation: judge and humble your self for old Sins as if they had been lately committed; and let the Sight of all your other Sins lead you up to the Fountain of all Actual Sin, to your Original Corruption; and bewail that, and loath your self for it.

Moreover, you must remember, that God hath other Ends in afflicting his, besides the chastening of them for Sin; he also by Afflictions tries, exerciseth, and improveth Faith, Patience, and other Graces. He by Afflictions stirs you up to Prayer, weans your Heart from the World, helps you the better to relish and savour Heavenly things, the Sweetness whereof you taste not when you are glutted with outward Prosperity. If you be any way a Gainer by your Affliction, you have reason to take Comfort therein, and to be thankful.

Thus I have done with the former Duty in time of Affliction, namely, the searching and trying of our Ways. I come now to the latter Duty, in those Words; *And let us*

turn unto the Lord: Of which I shall speak briefly, because I have in good part prevented my self in what hath been spoken concerning the former Duty.

From the manner of Expression or Phrase, of turning to the Lord, we learn the true Nature both of Sin and Repentance. Sin is an Aversion and turning away from God, and Repentance consequently is a returning to him. This is manifest from the usual Language of the Scriptures, which call Sin a forsaking God, a departing from God, a revolting from him, and the like. The Scriptures thus expressing Sin are so frequent, that I need not stand to mention them; And the Scriptures setting forth the Nature of Repentance by returning unto God, are as frequent. That the Nature of Sin lies in an Aversion from God, and Conversion to the Creature, will better appear if we descend to some particular Instances. Worldly Joy, what is it but a Joy in the Creature instead of the Creator, who is the proper Object of spiritual Joy? Carnal Confidence, what is it but a confiding in, and reliance on the Creature instead of God? And so 'tis no other than a leaving of God, to betake our selves to the Creature for those Supplies and Assistances which we stand in need of. So the Prophet sets forth the Nature of that Sin; *Cursed be the Man that trusteth in Man, and maketh Flesh his Arm, and whose Heart departeth from the Lord.* And although this our departing from God, and betaking our selves

Jer. 17. 5.

to the Creature, be not so apparent in divers other Sins; yet if we consider the Matter thoroughly, we shall find the thing is still the same: For in all Sin 'tis some kind of Profit or Pleasure, or Content or Satisfaction in one kind or other, that we look after. Now we sin when we seek these things in the Creature, turning aside from God in whom there is most eminently whatsoever the Creature can afford us towards our Satisfaction, and infinitely more. Hence may be inferred several things.

1. The great Evil of Sin. In every Sin God is set at nought and undervalued, and the Creature is preferred before him. Yea the Creature is upon the matter made our God, while that Trust and Confidence is put in it, that is only due to God; or that Satisfaction and Happiness is expected from it, that is to be expected only from God. The Apostle saith, *The covetous Man is an Idolater*, Eph. 5. 5. because he makes an Idol of his Riches, setting them up in the room of God, and making them the Object of his Trust and Reliance instead of God. The same is in some degree done in every Sin, when a Man makes the Creature the Object of that Joy and Delight, of that Satisfaction and Complacency that he ought to take in God only. Now this is an high Affront to God. What viler Indignity can be offered him, than that his Creatures should be preferred before him?

2. We may hence also infer the extream Folly that there is in Sin; for therein we forsake the Fountain of living Waters, and bewine out broken Cisterns that can hold no Water; as God complains of his People, Jer. 2. 13. We forsake God in whom is all Fulness, and betake our selves to the Creature which is meer Vanity and Emptiness.

3. Hence also we may infer the singular Goodness of God to us in our Afflictions, the Design and End whereof is to reduce us from our Wandrings, and to bring us back again to God from whom we have gone astray; to recal us from following the smaller Streams and empty Rivulets of Dissatisfaction and Vexation of Spirit, to the full and overflowing Fountain of all true Bliss and Happiness.

4. We may also hence infer, that the Duty of Repentance ought not to be so displeasing and unacceptable to us as usually it is: for as slow and distasteful a Work as it seems to be, 'tis but a returning to him who is the Well of Life, and a renewing our Acquaintance and Peace with him in whom our true Comforts are lodged, in whose Favour we live, and whose Loving-kindness is better than Life. Psal. 63. 3.

And so much of that Observation, from the Phrase, or Manner of Expression, by which our true Repentance and Reformation is signified.

Now, that our Return unto God is the thing that God expects from us in our Afflictions

tions, and which will assuredly prove the most effectual Means for removing God's afflicting Hand from us, I have already shewed in handling the former Dury. And all that I shall here add, shall be to shew very briefly, how we must return unto God, that his chastising Hand may be taken off from us, and by what Means we may be kept from leaving him again; and then answer one Objection that may be made against what shall have been spoken. Now as to the Manner how we must return unto God, if we will be freed from our Pressures.

(1.) We must return speedily. *I thought on my Ways, and turned my Feet unto thy Testimonies: I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy Commandments, said David, Psal. 119, 96, 66.* What through our Sluggishness, and what through our Unwillingness to forget our Sins, we are long a deliberating to return, and many Attempts and Essays we make at returning before we return indeed; and God in his Providence deals with us accordingly: he also seems to attempt to deliver us, but proceeds no further because we are so backward, and our Motions are so slow and inconsistent. Were our Returns to God speedy, we might hope they would speed our Deliverance.

(2.) We must return thorowly. We many times take some Steps towards God, and having gone half way, we sit down. Our Reformation is imperfect and partial. *We Hosea 7. 8, are like Ephraim, a Cake not turned; half Dough,*

Dough, and baked on one side only: and we fare accordingly. Though we have some Deliverance, as God speaks, 2 Chron. 12. 7. yet God doth not go through with his Work, because we go not through with our Work.

(3.) We must return resolutely and stedfastly, as I may so speak; I mean, with a resolute, fixed and stedfast Purpose of Heart, not to forsake God again, but to cleave unto him. When we return, God is most ready to entertain us, and be at Peace with us; but 'tis ever on Condition that we *turn not again unto Folly*. The Defect hereof was that which God complained of in his People; *their Spirit was not stedfast with God. Their Goodness was as the Morning-Cloud, and like the early Dew that goeth away.* Psal. 85. 8. Psal. 78. 8. Hosea 6. 4.

To prevent this our Return to Sin, and to enable us to cleave stedfastly unto God, (which was the second thing) these things would be done.

1st. Be ever sensible of your Proneness to revolt and depart from God. We are naturally *born to Backsliding*, as God speaks, Hos. 11. 7. The Sense of our Weakness is one good Preservative against it.

2^{dly}. Every day acknowledge all your Strength to adhere unto God, to be from God, and give him the Glory of it: Say with David, *Thou upholdest me in mine Integrity.* This Psal. 41. 12. Your thankful Acknowledgment of God in your Stedfastness and Perseverance, is the way still to engage him to uphold and establish you.

3^{dly}. Earnestly beg of God that he would keep you close to himself, and preserve you from declining. Beg with *David*, that God would *unite your Heart to him, to fear his Name*, Psal. 86. 11. And that according to his Promise, Jer. 32. 40. he would be pleased to put his Fear in your Heart, that you may not depart from him.

4^{thly}. Frequently set before your Eyes in your most serious Meditations, the Happiness of adhering constantly to God, and the extream Folly and Misery of departing from him. Recount the Comforts you have found in cleaving to him, and how often and sorely you have smarted for departing from him.

5^{thly}. Be ever watchful over your self; especially keep your Heart with all Diligence, observing and opposing the first Motions to Sin.

6^{thly}. Daily renew your purpose of cleaving to God, and of resisting those particular Sins by which you have heretofore most frequently departed from him.

And so I come to speak to the Objection which may be made, which was the last thing to be spoken to.

Object. I have, say you, both found out my Sin for which God afflicted me, and also forsaken it; and yet my Affliction still continues. How is this consistent with God's Promises of Deliverance out of Trouble upon our Return to him?

Ans^r. 1.

Ans. 1. You have found out and forsaken one Sin, but it may be you have not found out all: there may be other Sins not yet discovered, for which God's Hand is still stretched out against you. It may be the Sin which God principally intended, is still hid from your Eyes.

2. It may be, though you have for the present left your Sin, yet you have not left it out of a true Hatred of it, but only that you might be eased from the present Smart of your Affliction. God sees that you still retain an Affection for your Sin; and that though you have left it, yet you look back on it with a secret Desire after it, as *Lot's Wife* look'd back upon *Sodom*.

3. God hath also other Designs in afflicting you, as hath been said; 'tis probable your Faith hath not yet been sufficiently tried, and Patience hath not had its perfect Work; and for these and other such Ends, God sees good yet still to keep you in the Furnace of Affliction, though your Dross be in some good 'measure purged away.

4. However it be, or whatever other secret Reasons God may have for his Dealings with you, 'tis fit that you should patiently expect God's own Season of Deliverance, as he hath waited for you. Of the two there is infinitely more reason that you should be willing to wait for him.

The Seventeenth Sermon.

EZRA 9. 13, 14.

After all that is come upon us for our evil Deeds, and for our great Trespasse; seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our Iniquities deserve, and hast given us such a Deliverance as this:

Should we again break thy Commandments, and join in Affinity with the People of these Abominations? Wouldst not thou be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us, so that there should be no Remnant nor Escaping?

THIS Chapter contains Ezra's Address unto God, in which he confesseth and bewaileth the Sins of the Jews after their Return from the Captivity of Babylon, and more especially their having joined themselves in Affinity with Strangers, and married

A Sermon preached the Day the Fire began at Northampton.

Wives of those idolatrous Nations round about them, which was directly contrary to the Law of God, forbidding all such Affinities and Alliances. Now, this, their Sin was so much the greater, and so much the more difficult an Undertaking it was to put a stop to it, upon a threefold Account.

1. In regard of the general spreading of this Sin among them, and the great Multitude of such as had contracted this Guilt. We find, *Ezra* 10. 16, 17. that they who undertook the rolling away of this Reproach, and the reducing of the People to the Observation of the Law, were three full Months employed in examining Offenders in this kind, and in taking Security from them that they would put away their unlawful Wives: Had not the number of them been very great, much less time would have sufficed for transacting that Business.

2. In regard that they were not only the common, and the ordinary and inferior sort of People that had thus transgressed the Law, but the Princes and the Rulers had been chief in this Trespas: And the Priests and Levites, as well as the Princes, had been deeply involved in this Guilt. Yea, so far had this Corruption prevailed among them, that there were found even of the Sons of *Joshuab* the Son of *Josedak* the High Priest, that had taken strange Wives, as in the same Place we are informed.

Ver. 2.

Chap. 10.
18, 19, &c.

3. In regard that some of them that were in this Trespas, had been so long married to Strangers, that they had Children by them. Ver. 44. In all these respects, I say, as their Sin was exceeding great, so it was a Business full of Difficulty to attempt the Reformation of a People in these Circumstances, and so far engaged in illegal Practices. But however, Ezra being a Man full of Zeal for the Glory of God, and for the Good of that People, is not discouraged by all this. Notwithstanding all the Opposition that he was like to meet with in this hard Service, he courageously sets about it, and through the Presence of God with him, and the Blessing of God upon his Endeavours, he is successful in his Enterprize, and sees a desirable Issue thereof.

You who have Opportunities put into your Hands of doing any thing for God, and for the Good of the Place where God hath cast your Lot, suffer not the Apprehension of Difficulties to dismay you: Arise and be doing what lies in you, and leave the Success to God; he that once said, *Who art thou O great Mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a Plain*; can go before you, and make the crooked Places streight, and the rough Ways plain: he can most easily either remove all those Difficulties that dishearten you, or lift you above them: he often gives that Success to zealous and sincere Endeavours which not only answers, but far exceeds all our Desires and Expectations. But then

then let's be sure we take holy *Ezra* for our Pattern, and observe his Method. Being to undertake a great and difficult Business, he begins with Humiliation: he most affectionately confesseth, mourns over, and bewails the Sins of that People, the Reformation whereof he designed to attempt. The more deeply you can be affected with, and take to Heart the Sins, Disorders, and Abuses that you would remove; the more sincerely, cordially and affectionately you can mourn over them, and lament them; the more Tears you can shed for them in your Confessions of them before God, the better Success may you hope your Endeavours of Reformation will be attended withal. How passionately did *Ezra* lay to Heart the Sins of that People? As soon as he had heard how they had by illegal Affinities mingled themselves with their idolatrous neighbouring Nations, how ~~and~~ he behave himself, and what deep Sense of the Heinousness of their Sin, and Greatness of their Provocation did he express? *When I beard the thing, saith he, I rent my Garment, and my Mantle, and pluck'd off the Hair of my Head, and of my Beard, and sat down astonished: And at the Evening-Sacrifice I arose up from my Heaviness; and having rent my Garment, and my Manile, I fell upon my Knees, and spread out my Hands unto the Lord my God, and said, O my God, I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my Face to thee, my God; for our Iniquities are increased over our Head, and our Trespasse is grown up unto the Heavens. And then* he

he goes on in the same Extasy of Affection, laying open God's unspeakable Goodness to them, and the horrid Nature of their Provocation. And what's the Issue hereof, but such a Reformation as a Man would wonder how it could ever be effected and brought about, considering how many the Offenders were, how great and considerable the Persons of many of them were, and what strong Temptations and Engagements they had to make them unwilling to abandon their Sin. But upon *Ezra's* strange and almost unexampled Humiliation, God was pleased to exert and put forth his Power in a strange and extraordinary manner upon the Hearts of the Offenders, to prevail with them to disclaim and renounce their Sin, notwithstanding whatever carnal Motives and Considerations there were to endear it to them. If we could once attain to take Sin to Heart as he did, we might then expect to see better Fruits of our Endeavours after Reformation than yet we can. But this by the way.

In the Words that I have read, which are a part of *Ezra's* Address unto God by humble and affectionate Confession of their Sin, he spreads and lays open the Aggravations of it, together with the Danger and sad Issues of it, if they should still continue in it. The Aggravations thereof are these three.

(1.) The great Severity that God had formerly shewed against them for their Sins, which is set forth and express'd in the first Words;

The Seventeenth Sermon.

Words; *After all that is come upon us for our evil Deeds, and for our great Trespas.*

(2.) The merciful Tenderness and Compassion that God however even in that Severity was pleased to manifest towards them, in the next Words, *Seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our Iniquities deserve.*

(3.) The singular Favour God had shewed them in rescuing them from under those Calamities which their Sins had brought upon them in the Clause following; *And hast given us such a Deliverance as this.* These were the things by which their Sin would be greatly heightened; after so much Severity, Compassion and Kindness, to have returned to Folly, and to have broken God's Commandments again, was to have done as bad as they could, as the Prophet speaks, and to have given their Sins all the Aggravations that they were capable of.

Then as for the Danger they exposed themselves to, that was no less than utter Ruin and Destruction. After this Mixture of severe and merciful Providences, *Should we again break thy Commandments? wouldst thou not be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us, so that there should be no Remnant nor Escaping?* They had indeed already broken God's Commandment in a grievous manner, and sinned against him with an high Hand by those unlawful Marriages. His meaning therefore is, *Should we again break thy Commandment as we have done? Should we still*

still continue in our Sin, and obstinately refuse to be reduced to Obedience? If we should still perversly and irreclaimably go on in our Trespases, *wouldest thou not be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us?* Of these Particulars in order, as they lie in the Text.

I begin with the Aggravations of their Sin, the first of which is the great Severity God had formerly shewed against them for their past Transgressions: *After all that is come upon us for our evil Deeds, and for our great Trespas; should we again break thy Commandments?* Here divers things are observable.

1. That Ezra, and all those who joined with him in this Confession of their Sins, did endeavour to aggravate their Sins by calling in and laying together all these Circumstances by which the Heinousness of them might the better appear. And this they did to the end their Hearts might be the more affected with them, and the more soundly humbled for them; as also that they might be the more willing to forsake them. And this is the Property of all true Penitents, they ever desire to be thoroughly apprehensive of the Evil of their Sins; and therefore they aggravate them to the utmost; in their Confessions charging themselves fully with them, and laying as much Load upon themselves as they can. They think they can never speak enough against themselves, nor sufficiently discover and represent the Evil of their Ways, insomuch that sometimes they

they rather exceed than come short herein, charging themselves more heavily than there was cause for.

But Hypocrites, unhumbled and impenitent Sinners, are of a different temper; these instead of aggravating their Sins, are wont to extenuate and palliate them. If they be forced to confess them, 'tis for the most part but by halves that they do it. If they cannot but acknowledge they have offended, yet they will do it with an Apology, or with an Addition of something that may qualify and lessen their Sin: They are indeed sometimes overtaken, but 'tis very rarely; 'tis when they are drawn aside by ill Company, or overpower'd by the Strength of Temptation; that they are not the only Persons that are faulty in that kind; that some others that would be esteemed much better than themselves, are much more blame-worthy; that there is no Man but must have his Allowances, and that it would go hard with us all if all our Actions should be narrowly scanned, and the like. These and such like are the Excuses which they plead, and the Defences they make for themselves, when they should take shame to themselves, and own their Excesses and Exorbitances in their full Magnitude, judging themselves that they might not be judged of the Lord. These partial and favourable, lame and imperfect Confessions of Sin, when some little Part is owned, but much more is denied; when Fig-leaves and specious Pretences are studiously sought out

to cover as much of a Man's Shame as is possible, are ever an infallible Argument that the Sinner was never duly humbled for that Sin for which he hath still so much Kindness and Affection.

2. Another thing observable is, that *Ezra*, and those other holy Men, that together with him made this Confession, did impute all those Miseries and Calamities which they had suffered in the Captivity, unto their Sins: they did own their Sufferings as the Fruit of their Sins, and acknowledge their Transgressions to have been the meritorious Cause and Procurers of their Afflictions: *After all*, say they, *that is come upon us for our evil Deeds, and for our great Trespas.* They were convinced, and did yield and assent that God's Intentions in bringing those Evils upon them, were to punish them for their Sins. This Conviction and Acknowledgment was necessary for them, and is for us all in reference to our Afflictions; and yet 'tis very difficult to attain it. 'Tis necessary, because without it we can neither be patient under our Afflictions, nor profit by them, nor rationally expect a good Issue out of them.

1st. Unless we be convinced that our Sufferings have relation to our Sins, and own them as the Fruits of our Sins, we shall hardly be able to undergo with Patience what is inflicted on us. To be sure we shall want one of the most effectual Arguments to work Patience in us. 'Tis the Sense of our Sins deserting whatsoever is come upon us, and

an

an Acknowledgment of the righteous Hand of God in bringing such Afflictions on us for our Sins, that humbles and subdues our Hearts to God, composeth and quieteth our tumultuous Spirits, and gives check to all the Risings of our rebellious Nature against God's Providence. It was the Sense that *Eli* had of his own Guilt, and of the just Desert of his own Sin, and the Sins of his Family, that made him so patient, quiet and silent, when that heavy Sentence was by *Samuel* pronounced against him and his, as that he had not a Word to say more, than only to profess his humble and meek Submission to the good Pleasure of God; *It is the Lord*, saith he, *let him do what seemeth him good*. And this is that which the Spirit of God calls the

1 Sam. 3.
18.

Lev. 26. 41. accepting of the Punishment of our Sins. But if the Sinner be not convinced that he suffers for his Sins, and that his Transgressions have been the Procurers of his Afflictions, it cannot easily be but that his corrupt Nature should rebel against God, and impatiently rise up against his Providence as unequal, too rigorous and severe.

2dly. Neither can a Man profit by his Afflictions, unless he be convinced that his Sins have been the Cause of them, and that God strikes at them in his Sufferings. Who can think himself concerned to amend and reform that upon the account of his Afflictions, which he never discerned to be the Cause of them, nor can be convinced that they have any relation to it. But

let

derstand why you are afflicted, and to see the Sins which God strikes at in your Afflictions, is the first Step towards God's attaining his End in afflicting you. If this be not done upon you, nothing is done. And therefore you have no Reason to expect the Removal of them, unless it be to make way for some other more smarting Rod, which may effectually work that in you which God intended. But tho in these Respects it be most necessary to see and own our Sins as the Cause and Procurers of our Sufferings, yet to do it is as difficult as 'tis necessary. For such is the Pride and Stubbornness of our Hearts, that we are not easily brought to take Shame to our selves, and to acknowledge our own particular Sins to have been the Cause of our Sufferings, saying to our selves as God saith

Jer. 4. 18.

to Jerusalem, Thy Way and thy Doings have procured these things unto thee. We are very unwilling to acknowledge our own Guilt, and would much rather lay the Cause of our Sufferings at any other Door than our own. And this we are especially apt to do in publick and common Calamities. These we ascribe,

(1.) To Chance or common Providence, in which we do not think our selves particularly touch'd or concern'd.

(2.) To the Wickedness of some malicious and mischievous Instruments, that were the Contrivers and Caufers of our Sufferings.

(3.) To

(3.) To the Sins of others: The Provocations of such and such profligate and abominable Persons drew down the Judgments of God upon the Place, and not our own Offences. As for our selves, we suffered only in the Croud, and because we were found among those who were to be punished.

Or,

(4.) If we acknowledge our Sins in the general to have been the meritorious Cause of our Sufferings, yet we descend not to Particulars, we charge not our selves with such and such Sins for which God hath been angry with us. And so our owning our Sin only in general as the Cause of our Sufferings, is but a formal thing, with which we are little affected. 'Tis little better than if we had said, We believe indeed that we have deserved all that is come upon us, but we know not how nor wherein. *Extra* no doubt went a great deal further; 'tis not to be questioned but that he had in his most passionate Confessions, an Eye upon the particular Sins for which they suffered in *Babylon*. We may be sure they were not Generalities only that so deeply affected him: he had upon his Heart the particular Instances of their vile Provocations, together with the Circumstances of them, and so must we if we desire to be affected with God's terrible Providences as we ought, and to take them to Heart in a right manner. Though what I am now speaking concerns us all, yet there may be those amongst us who

may think themselves very little concerned therein.

1. Those who though they have been Sufferers together with others, yet have been free from all those foul and enormous Offences and high Provocations which many others have been guilty of; and possibly over and above their being free from the Guilt and Stain of fouler Sins, they have been such as have made a stricter Profession of Religion than most others. These Persons may be very inclinable to think that God did not particularly intend the correcting of them for their Sins, in the common Judgment that lighteth upon the Place, but that they suffer rather upon their Neighbours Account than their own.

2. Of the same Opinion perhaps may they be tempted to be, who seem even as to outward things, to have gained by their Afflictions, and to be in a better Condition, as to Trade, than they were in before. 'Tis easy for such, if any such be, to entertain themselves with a pleasant Dream, that God only emptied them, to the end he might fill them fuller than they were before; and that he had no other Design in pulling down their Houses, than that he might build them up fairer. But let neither the one nor the other deceive themselves. They would but flatter themselves, if they should think that God did not aim at their Sins in his severe Providences, as well as at the Sins of their Neighbours.

As

As for the former of these, though they may have been free from the fouler Abominations and crying Sins of the Place; and though they may have made a strict and high Profession of Religion, yet even such may have been tainted with the Pollution of many Sins which may have had no small Influence in procuring the heavy Judgments of God upon the Town. And their Sins in respect of their nearer relation to God, and stricter Profession, may have reflected more Dishonour upon the Name of God, than many of those Sins in others, which have otherwise had much more Flagitiousness and Enormity in them.

And as for the latter sort, who may seem to have gained by their Losses: If that be the Condition of any amongst us, let them not be too forward thence to conclude their Innocency. God may pull down in Anger, and wound in highest Displeasure; and yet such is his admirable Goodness and Compassion, that he may anon repent him of the Evils which he hath for our Sins most justly brought upon us, and with Advantage rebuild what he had pulled down, and so fully heal the Wounds that he had made, as to leave us in a better Condition of Health and Strength than he found us in. God by the Prophet *Ezekiel* foretelling the Return of the *Israelites* from *Babylon*, and their Re-establishment in their own Land, promised to settle them after their old Estates, and to do better unto them than at their beginning. Now what

*Ezek 36.
11.*

think you? Might they when God had made good this Promise, thence infer, that God was never angry with them for their Sins, and that their Sufferings in *Babylon* were never intended as their Punishment? Their Case may be yours: God hath, it may be, since the Fire, dealt better with you than at the beginning; you are in some Respects perhaps in a better Condition than formerly, perhaps your Trade is doubled: Will you therefore now wipe your Mouths, and say you were innocent; you never offended God so as to have had any Hand in procuring his Judgments to be poured out upon this Place? Far be it from you to draw such a proud Conclusion from God's gracious Providence towards you. Though God hath not only built you up again, but adorned and beautified you, and advanced you to a more splendid Condition than before, yet cease not you still to acknowledge and give glory to the righteous hand of God in pulling you down, and emptying you. Amid all your present Mercies and Advantages, be you still found putting your mouths in the dust, loathing and abhorring your selves for your evil ways, and from your hearts professing, That as you were most justly pluckt down, so you might still as justly have lain in Ruins and Ashes, and have been made perpetual Desolations, as God once threatned the Land of the

Jer. 25. 12. Chaldeans, a place never to be inhabited any more.

And

And so much concerning the second thing observable from this first aggravation of their Sins.

The Third Particular thence observable, is, That to return to Sin after we have been severely punished for it, and grievously smarted for it, doth much heighten our Sin, and render it much more provoking in the sight of God. This is clearly implied in the form of speech which *Ezra* useth; *After all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, should we again break thy commandments?* As if he had said, This were a provocation of an high nature; far be it from any of us to be guilty of it.

There are these three things that greaten and aggravate our Sins committed against God; and notwithstanding former great Severities against those our Sins.

1. To Sin again in the same kind, after that we had grievously smarted for Sin, argues a great degree of hardness of heart. The scall'd Child dreads the fire; and the very brut Beasts are afraid of meddling with that for which they have been soundly beaten. And were there any tenderness upon the heart of Man, he would not again easily be drawn to venture on that which he hath already paid so dearly for.

2. It argues an heart strongly engaged to Sin, and desperately bent after it, which no former Severities will restrain, or hold in. It shews a Man is mad in love with Sin, that

The Seventeenth Sermon.

will out after it whatever it cost him. 'Tis as much as if he said, 'Tis true, I have already tasted of the bitter fruits of Sin; I can tell by experience what 'twill cost me. But however, I must please my self, I must gratify my sinful desires, my sensual and brutish Lusts, and I will, I am resolved to do it, come what will of it.

2. It argues a slighting of the Anger and Displeasure of the Almighty, and a contempt of his Rod. Herein a Man's carriage towards God, is like that of a stubborn and incorrigible Child against him that chastens him. Tho you make him smart, he cares not; correct him as long as you will, he is still the same, and will do what he pleaseth, do you what you will, or can, to reclaim him. Take heed of this aggravation of your Sins, you who have been Sufferers by the Fire, and all you who have any other way been severely handled for your Sins. Beware how you have any more to do with those Sins against which the fierce indignation of the Lord hath been so discovered, and his Wrath, as it were, revealed from Heaven. Keep at the greatest distance from those Sins; come not near the Borders or Confines of them; run away from all temptations to them. And that you may be preserved from them,

1. Labour to know what they be. 'Tis now a good while since the dreadful Fire; though you were then in a miserable hurry, full of dread, distractions, and confusions, so as you had scarce the command of your
own

own thoughts; though then you had not so much sedateness and composedness of spirit, nor so much freedom and liberty as to sit down and consider, as to reflect and enquire into your self, as to call your self to an account, and find out the causes of God's fierce Indignation, yet since you have had time enough to do it. Have you done it? Have you gotten a sight of all those your particular Sins, by which the Wrath of God had been so highly incensed against you? If you have not, if this work hath so long been neglected, if to this day you have never set about it; if still you be strangers to the reasons of God's contending with you, yet be now at length perswaded to make a narrow search after all those Sins which have been the procurers of so much misery to your selves, and this place.

2. Having found out those Sins, have them often in your thoughts; and if it be possible, carry always upon your heart the impressions of that terrible Judgment, at least be sure that you often call it to mind, and renew the lively remembrance of it, and labour to preserve the images and representations of all the dismal circumstances of it in your mind; and then say with *Ezra* here in the Text, *After all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, shall we again break thy commandments?* So say in reference to all your particular Sins; your filthiness and uncleanness, your drunkenness and swearing, your profanation of the Lord's Day

Day and Ordinances, your pride and gallantry, your covetousness and earthly-mindedness, your unconscionable dealing, and your dishonest methods and artifices in the managing of your Trades and particular Callings; your scant Measures, and deceitful Ballances; your mingling, adulterating and embasing your Commodities to impole upon the Buyer, and inhance your gain; your allowing your selves in dissimulation, and lying, and falshood, for your advantage; your laying aside the golden Rule of our Saviour, and making no conscience of dealing with others, as you desire to be dealt with your selves; your seeking your selves, and your own things, with the disregard of your Neighbours, and the neglect of the Publick good; your lukewarmness, coldness and indifferency in the things that concern the glory of God, and the common and great interests of this place; your not using your power, and the authority you are entrusted and armed with, for the due punishment of Sin, and the beating down and suppressing of Vice; your unequal and partial dealing in the administration of Justice; your mutual animosities, variances, envyings, emulations, and heart-burnings; I say, in reference to all these, so far as any of you may have been guilty of them, and in reference to all other Sins whatsoever which any any of you may be convinced of as your own Sins by which you have contributed towards the drawing down of the late terrible Judgment

ment of God upon this place; Say with Ezra in the Text, *After all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, should we again break thy commandments?* Should we again return to those our sinful practises that have laid this place in ashes, and made it a ruinous heap? That have made it a by-word, and a Proverb, a gazing-stock, and an hissing, and an astonishment to all that pass by, and that have caused the Ears of all to tingle that have heard but the rumour and report of what the righteous hand of God hath brought upon us? O let's never think of taking up our former Sins, and closing with them again, after that God hath thus declared his anger against us for them, and by such terrible effects of highest displeasure, done almost whatsoever could be done to imbitter them to us, and disingage us from them.

But besides all this, to set our hearts at a greater remoteness from those Sins, let's also make use of those other Considerations which this Scripture affords us.

2. Therefore though God hath severely handled us, yet he *hath in wrath remembered mercy, and punished us less than our iniquities deserve.* If we take a true estimate of his dealings with us, we cannot chuse but discern much lenity and moderation, much tenderness and compassion to have been mingled with his severity; and that in many respects.

1. He that turned your Houses into ashes and rubbish, and took away a great part of
your

your substance, might have taken away all, and left you nothing.

2. He might by the same terrible Fire that deprived you of your Estate, have also deprived you of your Children and dearest Relations. The loss of one Child in such a way of terrible Providence, would have troubled you more, and have gone nearer your heart than the loss of all your Estate.

3. It might have been your own lot to have perished in the flames. God, that mercifully spared you, and rescued you from the violence of the fire, might by it have hurried you out of this World into Hell, and sent you from one fire to another. This fire was terrible, but the unquenchable fire of Hell had been much more terrible.

4. Though you had escaped the fire, and been as a Brand pluckt out of the burning, yet such impressions might the fright and danger you were in, have left upon you, that you might have lost the use of your Reason, and have been as a Child, or Ideot, all your days.

5. God might have made such impressions of his Wrath upon your spirit by that terrible Judgment, as you might never have been rid of them, but have carried them to your Grave. You might have been not only a terror to your self, but *Magor Missabib*, a terror to all about you, as long as you had lived. How mercifully and favourably hath God treated you amid his greatest Severities, feeling

ing none of these things have befallen you, or any of yours! O then go one step further with Ezra in the Text and say, *After all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, and seeing thou hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve, should we again break thy commandments?*

3. God was not only pleased to deal mercifully and compassionately with you in that heavy stroke, punishing you less than your Iniquities deserved; not stirring up all his wrath, nor suffering his whole displeasure to arise; but he hath also since been very gracious and favourable, kind and bountiful to you many ways.

1. Immediately upon that dreadful stroke, what rowlings of Bowels, and tender Compassions, did he cause in all the Countrey round about! What speedy and plentiful Supplies in that difficult Season, in that hour of your extream necessities, did God move the hearts of people to send you in from every quarter! Nobility, and Gentry, and Commonalty, Towns, and Villages in all the Circuit round, striving who should do most for you, and whose Charity should come most speedily in for your present succour and relief. What Moses saith of, that signal night in which God brought the Children of Israel out of Egypt, *It is a night much* Exod. 13. *to be observed to the Lord, for bringing them out* 42. *of the land of Egypt; this is that night of the Lord to be observed of all the Children of Israel in their generations: The same, or the like, may*
I say

I say of that day of your distress, when God in such a strange manner touch'd the hearts of all sorts of People with a tender sense of your sad and deplorable Condition, and so enlarged their hearts and hands towards you for your relief and supplies; 'tis a day much to be observed to the Lord to give him the glory of that mercy; 'tis that day which deserves never to be forgotten by you, or yours.

2. How kind and gracious was God to you in the mild and favourable Winter-season that followed, when many of the poorer sort were even houseless and harbourless, and when generally the Fewel that People had laid in for the Winter, had been consumed by the fire. What a gracious Providence of God towards you was it, That when you had neither warm Houses, nor provision of Fewel to defend you from the injuries of an hard Winter, the Weather should be so mild and temperate as the like had seldom been known; and that through his goodness to you, you should less need those helps and defences against the cold which God had then deprived you of! Should a severe and sharp Winter have followed the Fire, it could scarce have been possible but that many must have perished before the Winter had been over.

3. What Assistances and large Contributions have you had throughout the Kingdom towards the recruiting of your Losses, and the rebuilding of the Town! Though some miscarriages and loss there may have been in mana-

managing the Collections, and though all that you have received, bears not that proportion to your Sufferings and Losses, which some have conceived it did; yet, I believe, there was never any instance of any Town in *England* burnt, or ruined, for which so large Collections have been made. So exceedingly, and almost universally throughout the Kingdom did God stir up, and open the hearts of people to commiserate your Condition. God, *who hath the hearts of all men in his hand, and turneth them as the rivers of water whithersoever he pleaseth*, hath so toucht the hearts of Prince and People, City and Countrey, that all have contributed their assistances in an extraordinary and eminent manner towards your restauration. And as for the King's favour and bounty towards you, it hath been very signal several ways; the Instances whereof are very well known, and must for ever be remembred; setting aside *London* the *Metropolis* of the Kingdom, I think he never did so much for any distressed Town in his Dominions, as for this. In all which you must look to God, and acknowledge him as your great Benefactor.

4. Through the favour of God, and the great helps you have had from those instruments of your good which he hath raised up, the Town is now in a fair way of being rebuilt, and of being improved and advanced to a greater degree of lustre and beauty, than ever it had before the fire; And moreover
many

many of you, I hope, most of you, are in a good way of employment, and livelihood, the Trade of the Town beginning to recover together with the Building.

5. It hath also pleased God to add another Blessing that sweetens all your other Mercies, and gives you the comfortable enjoyment of them, and that is Health. There were great and just fears lest the straitness and inconvenience of poor Houses, and narrow Rooms, into which, for want of better Accommodations, several Families were sometimes enforced to crowd, might have occasioned some Epidemical Disease in the Town; but in this also the wonderful goodness of God to the Town hath appeared, there having hardly ever been known so long a Season of so much Health in the Town as since the Fire.

6. There is yet one thing more that crowns all your Mercies, and that is, That God affords you his Gospel; a Mercy, which of it self alone were enough to make you ample amends for all your Sufferings, though God should strip you of all other Comforts, *and*
 Isa. 30. 20. *give you only the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction.*

Now then, God having done all this for you; having raised you out of the dust, and set you upon your feet once more, and loaded you with so many Favours; what remains but that now you add what *Ezra* further adds in the Text, and say full out with him,
After

After all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass; seeing thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hast given us such a deliverance as this, should we again break thy commandments? Wouldst thou not be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us, so that there should be no remnant, nor escaping? I beseech you let us all labour to say so from our very hearts, and with the same holy indignation against our Sins, and strength of resolution to forsake them, as he did; and then he that hath begun to do us good, and carried on his work of Mercy thus far, will, no doubt, perfect it to his own glory, and our comfort.

But seeing our danger is so great, if we return to our folly after such terrible Judgments, and signal Mercies, give me leave to caution you against some of those Sins which we are most in danger of.

I. Now that your Town begins to rise again with greater beauty and lustre, take heed of being lifted up. *Be not high-minded; but fear,* lest for your Sins God lay you low, and level you with the ground once more. You know what Solomon saith, *Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.* The odious Sin of Pride hath formerly been imputed to this place. And doth it not begin to bud again, as the Prophet speaks, notwithstanding all that God hath done to humble us? If it do not, what means our apparel-ling our selves above our rank and quality? what means our forwardness to come as

Prov. 16.
18.

near as we can to every vain Fashion, and immodest Dress, which our loose times have taken up? How is it that we cannot content our selves with such comely Apparel, and modest Dresses, as become a People that have not long since been among the pots, and lain in the ashes; and whereby we might be Patterns of modesty and sobriety to others?

2. Take heed of making too much haste to recover and repair your Losses by any unlawful Artifices, or unjustifiable Methods of gain. *Solomon* again hath taught us, *Prov. 28. 20. That he who maketh hast to be rich, shall not be innocent.*

(1.) Take heed of setting unreasonable Prizes upon your Commodities. Do not so far deceive your selves, as to think your Losses now justify you in demanding what Rates you please. That were a very ill use of that heavy Judgment that had been upon you. Content your selves with moderate gain; so shall you rise again more surely, though more slowly.

(2.) Take heed of dealing hardly with the Poor, and oppressing them in those ways in which you make use of them. Let them have what is fit, and pay them well for their labour. Though your own gain for the present may be somewhat the less, yet both your Comfort and the Blessing of God upon what you have, will be so much the greater. Never think your self a loser by using a poor man well, and giving him with the most, rather

rather than with the least, for the service he doth you.

3. As for you, whose Calling lies in giving entertainment to others,

1. Take heed that you for your advantage make not your selves partakers of other mens Sins, by entertaining idle and intemperate persons at unseasonable hours, or by giving them more drink than is fit. This were the ready way to debauch the Town, and draw upon you the Curses of those Families that may be ready to starve at home, while bad Husbonds lose their time, and mispend their Money in your Houses, by which their Relations should be supported. Can you think that what is thus gained, will ever prosper with you? Would it not bring the Curse of God upon all that you have?

2. Above all, take heed of making your Houses the harbour and rendezvouz of leud and filthy Persons. Hath God for the Sins of *Sodom* inflicted the Judgment of *Sodom* upon you; and dare any set up, and carry on the same trade again in contempt of God, and in open defiance of his Judgments? If such impudent and daring Sinners should be still found amongst us, it were enough to set the Town on a light flame once more. Let such persons tremble to think what awaits them, if nothing will reform them.

Lastly, Be you all in general persuaded to lay aside your mutual Animosities and Contentions, which have been, and still are, the

great reproach of this place; *Be kindly affectionate one towards another, with brotherly love, as the Apostle exhorts. Be all of one mind, study peace, and the things that make for peace. Live in peace, and the God of peace and love shall be with you.*

The

The Eighteenth Sermon.

HAG. II. 6, 7, 8, 9.

Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, Yet once it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land: And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of Hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of Hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of Hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of Hosts.

WHEN God turned the Captivity of his People, brought them out of *Babylon*, and once more settled them in the Promised Land, they for a time wholly minded their own private Interests and Concernments;

H. h 3

but

The First Sermon Preached in the New Church at Northampton, Re-built after the Fire.

but the publick Worship of God, as if that had been no man's concern, was no man's care. The settling of their own Affairs, and the building and beautifying of their own Houses so took them up, that the building of the House of God was little regarded. It was long before this work was begun; and after it was begun, and some progress had been made therein, it met with several difficulties and interruptions, and went on very slowly, as for the most part Church-work doth. Two great obstructions there were that did not a little retard and set back this work, the one from without, the other from within.

1. The Enemies from without, omitted no endeavours, left no Stone unturned, whereby they might hinder the building of the Temple. And what by their own Power, what by their Interest in the *Persian* Court, they so far prevailed as to put divers stops to the work.

2. The obstruction from within, was their lukewarmness and indifferency, their want of Zeal and Forwardness for promoting and carrying on the work. Now as well for their encouragement against the Enemy, as for rousing them up and exciting them to more Zeal and Activity in promoting a work in which the honour of God and the happiness of that People were so much concerned, God was pleased to raise up and employ two extraordinary Persons, the Prophet *Haggai* and the Prophet *Zechary*. The Prophet *Haggai* having reprov'd them for their slackness and

and negligence, for their minding their own private Interests and Affairs with the neglect of what referred to the honour and publick worship of God; and having laid before them the several Judgments which for this their Sin God had inflicted on them, doth assure them of God's gracious presence, assistance, and blessing in this weighty undertaking, if they should in good earnest engage therein, and pursue it with that Zeal, Vigour, and Industry, which in the managing and carrying on of so important an Affair was requisite. Now to the end that all objections against it might be answered, and whatsoever was or could be matter of discouragement might be removed, the Prophet in the words that I have read, doth meet with the principal things which carnal Reason might pitch upon, and make use of for the cooling of their Zeal, the rebating of their Industry, and the slackning of their Endeavours. Were the Adversaries and Opposers of this work numerous and potent? How many and how potent soever they were, the Lord of Hosts would be with his People, and stand by them. He would exert and put forth his Almighty Power in the behalf of them; he would shake the Heavens, and the Earth, and the Sea, and the dry Land. He would make all things give way to, yield, and stoop to his design; and rather than any thing should hinder the accomplishment of what he had undertaken to do for his People, he would turn the World

upside down. Now upon their late return from Seventy years Captivity in *Babylon*, was their outward condition strait, poor and low? Were they altogether unfurnished with those rich supplies which were necessary for carrying on so costly a work? That this might not trouble or dishearten them, God tells them the Silver is his, and the Gold is his. He had all the Riches of the World at command, and could plentifully furnish and supply them, if he saw good. Now that the platform of the House was drawn out, and the Foundations of it were laid, did the meanness of it discourage them? Did it seem a poor and contemptible thing in comparison of *Solomon's Temple*? How mean and despicable soever it might be in the eyes of any of them, and how far short soever it was likely to be of the Splendor and Magnificence of *Solomon's Temple*, yet God promiseth to fill that House with Glory, and that the Glory of that latter House should be greater than the Glory of the former. Were the frequent commotions and changes of the World, and the inconstant and variable state of things in those parts of the World such as promised them little quiet and satisfaction in the enjoyment of God's publick worship when the Temple should be finished? For allaying of these their fears, as the close of all that God had promised, he tells them, that he would give peace in that place. And in regard that these were great things, and such as an oppressed people that had been long under
hatches,

hatches, and had but of late begun to put up their Heads, could not easily believe; God engageth his Omnipotency and Faithfulness for the performance of them, within the compass of four Verses, five times repeating that solemn form of words, *Thus saith the Lord of Hosts.*

So I have given you the main Intendment and Scope of these words. In the handling of them, I must take them in order as they lye. And because there are many things contained in them, which might take up some Hours if they were treated of at large, I must with all convenient brevity speak to Particulars, and pass on from one thing to another as lightly and speedily as I can. But as I go on, where the matter will admit of it, and as far as it shall be capable thereof, I shall endeavour to bring it as near the present occasion as I may.

Though the words will scarce admit of any genuine, proper and convenient division, yet such a division as they are capable of, you may thus take.

1. We have a Prediction of great concussions and shakings in the World before the coming of the Messiah: *Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land, and will shake all nations.*

2. We have a Prediction of his coming: *And the desire of all nations shall come.*

3. A

3. A Promise of the Glory of the second Temple, together with an answer to an objection against it: *And I will fill this house with glory: the silver is mine, and the gold is mine.*

4. An Amplification of that Promise concerning the glory of the second Temple: *The glory of this latter house shall be greater than the glory of the former.*

5. An additional Promise of Peace, as an Appendix to all other Mercies promised: *And in this place will I give peace.*

6. The Ratification or Confirmation of the whole, in those last words, *saith the Lord of Hosts*, so often mentioned before, and with which all that was before promised, is at last shut up and sealed.

To begin with the first of these, the Prediction of great concussions and shakings in the World before the coming of the Messiah; It is yet a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land, and will shake all nations. By these Metaphorical Expressions, according to the usual Language and Style of the Prophets, we are to understand great Troubles, Commotions, Changes and Alterations in the World, in which high and low, Persons of all Conditions, Ranks and Qualities, represented by the Heavens and the Earth, should take their turns, and have their share. So God speaking of his terrible Judgments on the World, Isa. 13. 13. *saith, I will shake the heavens; and the earth shall*
remove

remove out of its place in the wrath of the Lord of Hosts; and in the day of his fierce anger. But now all the difficulty is, what shakings should be here intended. Some understand the words of the great things which the Evangelists report to have been done at and upon the Birth of Christ, the Miracles wrought by him in his Life, the strange and miraculous Providences at his Death and Resurrection; and of the shaking of the World afterwards by the preaching of the Gospel, whereby Idols were thrown down, Heathenish Idolatry and Superstitions, were abolished, the Christian Religion, and the Worship of the true God coming in place thereof. These were great and wonderful things; but how they should be here by the Prophet intended, is not easy to conceive. For he seems to speak of such concussions and shakings as should be antecedent to the coming of Christ, and go before it, not concur with it, much less follow after it. Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land: and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come; that is, after God should thus have shaken the World, Christ should come. And indeed very great and dreadful shakings there were between the time of this Prophecy, and the coming of the Messiah; in which shakings the people of God, the Jewish Nation, were not a little concern'd. The Persian Empire, under which they now were, was not only shaken, but shaken in pieces, dissolved and ruined

ruined by the *Grecians* under the Conduct of *Alexander the Great*. Then presently after *Alexander's* Death, who died in the flower of his Age, the Empire which he had but just then acquired and been possessed of, was in effect once more rent in pieces, and divided amongst his Chieftains and Principal Commanders. While this state of things continued, the *Jews* were miserably shaken, oppressed, and harassed by the Tyranny and Cruelty of *Antiochus Epiphanes*, besides many other grievous pressures and sufferings, which during the Government of the *Seleucides* they underwent. After some time the *Romans* came upon them all, and subdued all to themselves; in which Revolution the distressed *Jews* fell under the power of the *Romans*, and were at their Mercy. After all these terrible shakings, nearer the coming of Christ, the Civil Wars under *Augustus Caesar*, caused horrible shakings and convulsions in the Empire; after which the Temple of *Janus* was shut up, and a peaceable time ensued, all Swords being sheathed, and all Arms laid aside throughout the whole Empire; and then was Christ the Prince of Peace born in the Forty first, or as some will have it, in the Forty second year of the Reign of *Augustus Caesar*.

Now whereas all these shakings were to go before the coming of Christ, which was the greatest Mercy that ever was vouchsafed the World, we may observe,

That

That great Troubles and Afflictions sometimes go before and make way for great and signal Mercies. This is indeed the ordinary and usual method of God's most wise and gracious Providence.

Thus *Joseph* is sold to the *Midianites*, carried into *Egypt*, and there again sold to *Potiphar*, falsely accused, cast into Prison, and laid in Irons, that by this Series of long-continued Afflictions way might be made for his Advancement to the highest Honour in *Pharaoh's* Court, and for his being made Ruler over all the Land of *Egypt*.

Thus seventy years Captivity and Bondage in *Babylon* goes before the joyful and triumphant Return of God's people into their own Land, of which the Psalmist thus speaks, *When the Lord turned the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream: then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them.* Which Psalm, though placed among the *Psalms of David*, yet is by Learned men, upon good grounds, supposed to have been penned by some other Person after the return from *Babylon*; as also *Psal. 137.* that is to say, 460 years at least after that *David* had been gathered to his Fathers; and perhaps much more, for we know not how long after the return from *Babylon* it might be penned. Psal. 126.
1, 2.

Thus the Ten most Cruel and Bloody Persecutions of the Christian Church in the first Ages thereof, went before that quiet and tran-

tranquility which the Church enjoyed under *Constantine* and the succeeding Christian Emperors, when, to use the expressions of the Prophet, *God made the peace of his Church as a river, and the righteousness thereof as the waves of the sea.*

Thus that wicked Usurpation and Tyranny of Antichrist, making havock of the Church, which hath been drawn out to so great a length already, and yet we know not how much longer it may last, goes before that happy estate of the Church, and of the World, when those joyful Acclamations shall be heard, *The kingdoms of the World are become the kingdoms of the Lord, and of his Christ, Rev. 11. 15.* And when they who shall have gotten the victory over the beast and over his image, shall sing the song of Moses and of the Lamb, saying, *Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty, just and true are thy ways, thou king of saints, Rev. 15. 1, 2.* And to add but one instance more here at home; thus after the sharp and bitter Persecutions under the Reign of Queen *Mary*, followed that blessed Sunshine of the Gospel, and the peaceable and undisturbed Enjoyment thereof throughout all the long and prosperous, or rather glorious Reign of Queen *Elizabeth*, and the continuance of it to us ever since, even to this day, notwithstanding all the destructive Machinations, wicked Plots, and restless Attempts of the Enemy to deprive us of it, and to put out our light in obscure darkness.

Now

Now some of the reasons of this method of Divine Providence are these.

1. It conduceth very much to the displaying and illustrating of the glory of God's Wisdom, Power and Goodness, who can so wonderfully change the most dark and dismal state of things, *who creates darkness, and forms light, Isa. 45. 7. Who turns the shadow of death into the morning,* as the Prophet speaks, *Amos 5. 8.* Who turns a Town into Ashes and Rubbish in the space of few Hours, making it a Place meet for *Zim and Okim* to take up their abode in; the merciless Element where it raged, scarce leaving a Lintel for the Cormorant or Bittern to lodge in, or the remainders of a scorched Window to sing in: And then again within the space of few years, out of the Dust and Ashes to raise up a Town for the Accommodation of Men, and a Church for the Service of God, and both with the addition of that beauty and lustre which had never been, unless God had laid the Foundations of that change for the better in ruin and desolation. All Beholders must needs acknowledge, such admirable turns and vicissitudes of things, to be the operation of his Hands, who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.

2. By dark Providences, by Troubles and Afflictions, God fits and prepares us for Mercies. Our Afflictions when sanctified, humble

ble us, lay us low, make us reflect upon our selves, and consider our ways; make us repent, reform, and turn to him that smiteth us; and all this tends to the rendring us meet to be partakers of the Mercies which God hath in store for us. For while we go on impenitently in a course of Sin, blessings would be curst to us, and abuse of Mercies would increase our misery.

3. Afflictions commend God's after-mercies, and make them more sweet and acceptable to us, as the darkness of the Night commends the light of the Morning. A quiet and calm Season after a Storm, how welcome, how pleasant and delightful is it! Such is the unspeakable goodness of God, that he so much consults our comfort, as to order and dispose of the circumstances of our Mercies, so as they may afford us most content and satisfaction.

4. Great Troubles and Afflictions going before great Mercies, dispose our Hearts to greater thankfulness for them. When Mercies come in upon us in such a season, and with such circumstances, they greatly affect us, and make deep impressions on our Hearts, so as we think we can never be thankful enough, we can never bless God sufficiently for them.

Now to apply this briefly;

The consideration of what hath been said concerning this method of God's Providence,
and

and the Reasons of it, should perswade us, and prevail with us to bear Afflictions meekly, quietly, and patiently, and with that composedness, calmness, and evenness of Spirit which becomes Christians, who are no strangers to the usual ways of God's Providence, neither fretting against the Lord, nor desponding, or casting away our confidence in him. Though it be night with you at present, yet you may hope it will not be so always, the day will return. There is an interchangeable vicissitude of these Providences; after darkness light breaks forth, and the longer your night hath been, the nearer are the approaches of the day; wherefore in the most dark and disconsolate condition say with the Church of God, *I will look unto the Lord, I will wait for the God of my salvation.* Mic. 7. 7.
Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy, when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me; he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness. Mic. 7. 9.

So I have done with the first thing, the Prediction of great concussions and shakings in the World before the coming of the Messiah.

2. I come now to the second Particular; The Promise of his coming, *And the desire of all nations shall come.* The Desire of all Na-

tions, that is, Christ the object of the desire of all Nations, or whom all Nations shall desire. But then this must be understood of some of all Nations, of as many out of all Nations as are disposed to receive him; though others, perhaps the generality of some Nations, may be so far from desiring him, that they may hate him, blaspheme his Name, and persecute to the Death all that acknowledge him for their Saviour. But if this sense be judged too strait, then by the desire of all Nations we may understand the desireable of all Nations, or he who hath that in him which should render him lovely and desirable to all Nations, and in respect whereof all Nations may and should desire him, and so far as they know him, and understand their own interest, will desire him. This description or character of Christ is agreeable to what the Scriptures elsewhere say concerning him. The Spouse having described him, and set forth his Perfections and Excellencies, saith *He is the chiefest among ten thousand*, Cant. 5. 10. *And altogether lovely*, ver. 16.. And Jacob Prophetically speaking of him under the Name of *Sibiloh*, saith, *To him shall the gathering of the people be*, Gen. 49. 10. That is, all People and Nations out of an high esteem of him, and an earnest desire after him, shall flow into him. So God speaking of the coming in of the Gentiles to the Church in the Times of the Gospel, and under the Kingdom of the Messiah, saith, *Behold, I will lift up my hand to the Gentiles*, and

and set up my standard for the people, and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders, Isa. 49. 22. In that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign to the people; so it shall the Gentiles seek, Isa. 11. 10. Behold my servant, whom I uphold, mine elect in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him, he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles: I will give him for a Covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles, Isa. 42. 1. It is a light thing that thou shouldst be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation to the ends of the earth, Isa. 49. 6. Hence it is that the Church gathered out of all Nations, is represented to St. John in a Vision as giving glory to Christ. I beheld, saith he, and lo a great multitude which no man could number; of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm in their hands, and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb, Rev. 7. 9, 10.

Now if you ask in what respects, and upon what account Christ is the desire of all Nations? I answer, this is a subject which would take up much time if I should enlarge on it. Briefly therefore, he is the desire of all Nations, because he is the promised seed in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed, Gen. 22. 18. Because he is the Saviour of all Nations, the saviour of the world;

John 4. 42. *The preparation for the Sins of the whole World,* 1 John 4. 2. *There being no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved,* Acts 4. 12. In short, he it is that satisfieth the Justice of God for Sinners, and delivers them from the wrath to come, that purchaseth for them pardon of Sin, peace with God, Grace here, and Glory hereafter. In a word, this is he who is of God made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption, 1 Cor. 1. 30. Now let us all reflect upon our selves, and consider whether he who is the desire of all Nations, be the desire of our Souls; and whether he be in our esteem the chiefest among ten thousand. Do we count all things lost and dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ? Do we intirely love him? Do we earnestly long after him? Are our Affections towards him such as we can never be satisfied until we can say that he is ours, and we are his? Could we be content to purchase him at any rate? And is there nothing in all the World so dear unto us, but that we could freely part with it for his sake? O let us never be at rest until we find that our Hearts stand thus affected towards him. What say you to this, all ye that have the Name of Christ frequently in your Mouths, and by an external Profession own him as your Saviour, but say of him in your Hearts, *We will not have this man to reign over us?* Ye that give him good words, but refuse to take his Yoke upon you, and submit to his Government; who profess you know

know him, love him, desire him, and give him the chief room in your Hearts, but in your works deny him, being abominable, disobedient, and to every good work reprobate. Deceive not your selves, Christ will never own such as you are. Without timely and sincere Repentance, the sentence which you must expect from him is, *Depart from me, ye that work iniquity, I never knew you,* Mat. 7. 23.

Hitherto of the Character of Christ. Now as to the Promise of his coming; all that I shall therein take notice of, is the circumstance of time, when he was to come, namely, while the second Temple should be yet standing; for he was by his presence to fill that House with Glory, and to make the Glory of the latter House greater than that of the former, as we shall presently see. And this circumstance of his coming, is that which also the Prophet *Malachi*, who prophesied immediately before his coming, foretold. *Behold, saith the Messiah himself, I send my messenger, (that is, John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ) and he shall prepare the way before me; and the Lord whom ye seek (namely the Lord Christ) shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the Covenant whom ye delight in.* This, as it confutes the unbelieving and blasphemous Jews, and argues the wilful blindness of their minds, and the miserable obstinacy and hardness of their hearts in denying the Messiah to be

Mal. 3. 1.

come, and still fixing new periods of time for his coming, as they find still that he comes not at the times by them assigned him for his coming; so it greatly confirms our Faith in Christ as the true Messiah. For as all other things prophesied and foretold concerning the Messiah exactly agree to him and none else; so doth this remarkable circumstance of the time of his coming.

Wherefore the Apostle saith, *When the fulness of time was come, God sent his Son into the world made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, Gal. 4. 4, 5.* When the fulness of time was come, that is, when the time which God had predetermined and foretold was fully come. This is that which Jacob prophesied of, Gen. 49. 10. *The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet until Shiloh come.* Though the Jews had now ever since the Conquest of Judea, by Pompey, been under the Power of the Romans, and by them been deprived of all power to judge, determine, and punish in Capital Matters; yet in other matters they had still a power allowed them, so as all Government was not wholly wrested away from them, and taken out of their hands. But now the time was drawing near when their City and Temple were to be utterly destroyed; their Polity, Civil State, and Commonwealth to be abolished, the remainders of them, after the fatal slaughters of that miserable people at the destruction of Jerusalem, to be dispersed and scattered into

into several Countreys, and not as much as the face or shadow of any Government to be left among them. At this signal and critical time, when the day of these their Calamities hastened, was Christ born. The sum of all is this, The Messiah was to come while the second Temple was yet standing, and while the Scepter was not yet wholly departed from *Judah*, nor a Lawgiver from between his feet; while at least somewhat of Civil Power and Government still remain'd among them; and so accordingly he came. But 'tis now above sixteen hundred years since the Temple was destroyed, and all Civil Government among them, into what quarters of the World soever scattered, perfectly abolished. In vain therefore do the *Jews* expect any other Messiah; and as for us Christians, we have all imaginable evidence that Jesus, the Son of the Blessed Virgin *Mary*, is the Christ, the promised Messiah. To him therefore let us betake our selves for the pardon of our Sins, and the salvation of our Souls; on him let us rest, to him let us securely commit the Everlasting Concernments of our Souls. *Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ, 1 Cor. 3. 11. If an angel from heaven preach any other gospel, take upon him to hold forth any other Messiah, or to declare any other way of salvation, let him be accursed, Gal. 1. 8.*

1. Now follows the third Particular, A Promise of the glory of the second Temple, together with the answer of an objection against it; *I will fill this house with glory; the silver is mine, and the gold is mine. I will fill this house with glory, that's the Promise.* In which words there seems to be a double Allusion; partly an Allusion to the external glory of Solomon's Temple that was so magnificently built, and so richly beautified and adorned; and partly to the glorious appearance of God in that Temple, at the dedication thereof, concerning which we read, *1 King: 8. 10, 11. That a cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord had filled the house.* So then, as the first Temple was filled with glory, so God promised the second should also be. But now what glory is here meant, and how this Promise was fulfilled, I shall presently shew when I come to speak of the Amplification of the Promise. For the present it is enough to know that God undertakes it, who can do whatsoever he pleaseth, and will do whatsoever he hath promised. But however carnal reason objects, How can these things be? Where is the Silver and the Gold? Where are the rich materials where with this House shall be so splendidly rebuilt? To this tacit objection that might be in the minds of that oppressed and indigent people, God answers, *The silver is mine,*

and

and the gold is mine. As if he had said, If I undertake to fill this House with glory, make you no question but that I shall find means for effecting it.

And was there not a time when the objection of this people was, or might have been ours? He that had seen this Town, and the place in which now we are assembled, the next morning after the dreadful Fire, would have despaired of living to see it rebuilt as now it is; he would rather have thought that the sentence pronounced against Moab had belonged to it, that it should be for *the breeding of nettles and salt-pits, and a perpetual desolation.* If there had been any Prophet then among us that could have said, Out of these Ashes and ruinous heaps shall a Town and a Church be raised within the space of a few years, and you shall see it more beautiful and splendid than ever it was before the Fire; the reply would have been, Where is the Silver, and where is the Gold wherewith it shall be done? Whence shall the distressed and impoverished Inhabitants have wherewithal to compass it? But blessed be God, who hath found out means, and afforded helps to bring it to pass. He who saith, *The silver is mine, and the gold is mine*; he who hath the *treasures of darkness, and the hidden riches of secret places at his disposal*, as he speaks, hath inclined the Hearts of Prince and People, of Nobility and Gentry, of City and Country, to lend their assistance towards it in such a full stream of bounty,

Zeph. 2.9.

Isa. 45. 3.

bounty, as scarce admits of any parallel. But to the King's Bounty and Munificence do we in a more eminent and singular manner under God owe the Rebuilding of the Town and the Church, and more especially of the Church, which as long as it continues in being, will be a standing Monument thereof. As we must with all thankfulness acknowledge our deep obligations to all from the highest to the lowest that have been Instruments of our good, and particularly to the Gentlemen, the Commissioners, by whose care and industry this place for the publick Worship and Service of God hath at length been perfected; so must we give God all the glory, who sets all Instruments a-work, who hath the hearts of all men in his hand as the rivers of water, and turneth them whithersoever he will. Who said of Cyrus, *He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure; even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundations shall be laid.*

Prov. 21. 1.

Isa. 44. 28.

4. So I go on to the fourth Particular, the Amplification of the Promise; *And the glory of this latter house shall be greater than the glory of the former.* If these words should be understood of outward glory, it would be hard to shew how the Promise was fulfilled. We read that when the Priests and Levites, and the chief of the Fathers, who were ancient men that had seen the former House, saw the Foundation of the second Temple laid before

Ezra 3. 12.

before their eyes, they wept with a loud voice, considering how short the latter House came of the former. *Who is there among you,* Hag. 2. 3. *said the Lord, that saw this house in her first glory? And how do you see it now? Is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?* So then clear it is, that Zerobabel's Temple as to the Structure and outward Ornaments thereof, was no way comparable to Solomon's Temple. Some indeed say, that this Temple was so far enlarged and beautified by Herod, that it did not only equal, but exceed Solomon's Temple. That Herod enlarg'd and beautif'd it, is granted, but that he so improved it as it excelled Solomon's Temple, may very well be questioned. 'Tis therefore another kind of glory than that which consists in external lustre and magnificence, a spiritual glory that God intended when he promised, that *the glory of the latter house shall be greater than the glory of the former.* And that spiritual glory lay especially in this, that the promised Messiah, the Eternal Son of God Incarnate, should honour and dignify this second Temple by his being presented there, by his frequent access unto it, by his corporal presence, and by his teaching in it. Hereby was made a far greater accession of glory to that Temple, than all Solomon's Gold and Silver, Riches and Magnificence could put upon the former Temple.

Now whereas God in effect promised, that what was wanting as to external glory in the second Temple, should be made up with
advantage

advantage in spiritual glory; we may hence observe,

That spiritual glory is the chief glory; and where this is, it abundantly makes up and supplies the defects of other glory. This is a truth, the consideration whereof is not unreasonable at present. We have here a fine and beautiful Church which draws many eyes upon it; and if there be nothing undecently pompous or gaudy in it, I would hope the beauty of a Church would be an eye-sore to no man. If we adorn our own Houses without offence, why should not some Ornament be allowed the House of God? provided that such moderation and decency be therein observed, as becomes a place dedicated to the Service of God.

Besides, I know not but the decent, chaste, and modest Ornament of a place in which God is to be worshipped, may be a means of drawing some people thither who would not much care to assemble themselves in an indecent and sordid place.

*Aspicis ut veniant ad candida tellus columbae;
Accipiet nullas sordida turris aves.*

But yet however, we must take heed that we place not too much in these external things; that we please not our selves too much in them. When all is done, Spiritual Ornaments are the only Ornaments, and Spiritual Glory the true Glory: If that be wanting to this place, all other glory will signify little. Sin marring the beauty, and frains the glory of any place or people. Sound Doctrine, pure
Ordi-

Ordinances, Spiritual Worship, the holiness and unblameableness of our Lives, the conversion of Sinners, the turning of many to righteousness: these are the things that will more beautify and adorn this place, that will reflect more true and substantial Glory on it, than all the Cost and Art that hath been expended and laid out upon it to adorn and beautify it.

These are the things that would make the glory of this latter house greater than the glory of the former.



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